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Great Adventure Stories

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Edited by Rafer Brent
author



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Illustration Credits

Klondike Mike Mahoney *from a painting by Brendan Lynch*

The Beans Lasted Three Days *from a painting by Victor Mays*

Death on the Mountain *from a photo by the French Government Tourist Office*

Mike Fink *from a painting by Jack Hearne*

The Great Georgia Mail Train Race *from a painting by Jack Hearne*

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Great Adventure Stories



Klondike Mike Mahoney

Whenever there was a fight or a frolic, from Bonanza Creek to Skagway, they called for Mike. Before he was twenty-one, he was a Yukon legend, at thirty-six he was a millionaire.

JACK PEARL

Michael Mahoney, president of the International Sourdoughs Association, opened the 1937 convention at Portland, Oregon, with a time-honored ritual, the reading of Robert Service's poem, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew":

*A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the
Malamute saloon;
The kid that handles the music-box was hitting a
ragtime tune;
Back of the bar, in a solo game, sat Dangerous
Dan McGrew;
And watching his luck was his light-o'-love, the
lady that's known as Lou . . .*

As the big man on the speaker's platform began to recite, the members of his audience settled back restively in their seats with a scraping of shoe leather and a clearing of throats. They were a distinguished assembly; lawyers, engineers, doctors, and businessmen from all over the world. Men in their late fifties and early sixties, they were for the most part prosperous and influential. Nobody would have picked them out as members of that army of rough, bearded, hard-drinking sourdoughs that had spearheaded the 1897 Gold Rush into the Yukon almost half a century before. Money and success had changed them, Mike Mahoney observed. It was hard to believe that these genteel men,

sitting politely attentive on the edges of their seats, were the rowdy bunch of hell-raising stampeders he had known in the Klondike. What had happened to the magic fellowship they had discovered in a snowbound hut around a potbellied stove, the vows they had made over a bottle?

*When out of the night, which was fifty below, and
into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-
dirty, and loaded for bear.
He looked like a man with a foot in the grave and
scarcely the strength of a louse,
Yet he tilted a poke of dust on the bar, and called
for drinks for the house.
There was none could place the stranger's face,
though we searched ourselves for a clue;
But we drank to his health, and the last to drink
was Dangerous Dan McGrew.*

It was getting to be a tired ritual, Mike thought sadly. Where the hell did a big slob who never got past the fourth grade come off reading poetry? He had enough trouble with simple English. He never got the meter quite right, and he always hammed it up in the dramatic parts. This getting together every year was becoming a tired affair. The old ties had petered out like the veins of gold in the frozen earth.

A pang of nostalgia gripped him as he remembered the day he had blown into Seattle in the summer of 1897, a husky redheaded kid of twenty-one, fresh out of the sticks.

On the same day, the steamer *Portland* had docked in Seattle harbor with news of the big gold strike in the Klondike.

Mike was looking for work in the mills, but these were hard times for the lumber industry. Like a lot of other young men in the same predicament, he caught the gold fever. A few days later he shipped north on an old scow named the *Willamette*, as a tender for a shipment of mustangs—board and passage free—along with six hundred other eager “cheechakos,” who were impatient to wallow

in the muddy waters of Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks, which ran "knee-deep in gold," according to the glowing reports in the newspapers.

There was considerable disappointment among the six hundred gold hunters who stampeded up the gravel beach at Skagway in the dawn of an early September morning. None of them had had any clear impression of what a "boom town" would be like, but they had all been confident that it would be gay and colorful and exciting in a spectacular fashion. What they found was a sprawling tent city, cramped into a half-moon beachhead hacked out of the giant spruce forest that grew almost to the edge of the sea. A single block of frame buildings was under construction on either side of a muddy, potholed street, leading up from the port's only dock.

While the other prospectors sorted out their extensive equipment and supplies from the mountain of cargo on the pier, Mike, whose sole possessions were the clothes on his back and six dollars in cash in his pocket, started up the street toward the new town. To him the air was alive with latent excitement. Somewhere in the distance he recognized the frenzied whine of a buzzsaw and the steady *chunk, chunk* of axes biting into soft wood; he could tell from the tempo of their strokes that these men were in a hurry. The boom of the falling timber echoed back and forth off the mountains that bordered Skagway on three sides; he could feel the ground tremble through the soles of his boots. The whole town seemed to be quivering with anticipation, straining at the leash. He took a deep breath, savoring the clean, dry air, spiced with the aroma of spruce needles and fresh sap.

On the main street, where the building was going on, teams of carpenters were hammering and sawing furiously. Mike was surprised to see a number of business establishments already operating within the half-completed structures. Halfway down the block he spied a crudely lettered sign which read: **PACK TRAIN SALOON**. Through the open

doorway he saw a bartender polishing glasses behind the bar. He went inside and introduced himself.

"We ain't rightly open for business this early in the day," the bartender told him. "But after that long sea voyage, I guess you need a pick-me-up. What'll you have?"

"A glass of cream soda," Mike said.

"Cream soda!"

"Cream soda," Mike repeated solemnly. "And I'd take it kindly if you'd join me in a drink."

"Thanks," the bartender said dryly. "If it's all the same to you, I'll stick to whiskey." He dragged a case of soft drinks out from under the counter. The dust lay on it in drifts. "We stocked this in for when the ladies and the kiddies begin to arrive." He cast an appraising look at his customer and shook his head. "Ordinarily, I'd hesitate about serving cream soda to a man in my place—for his own safety. But you look like you can take care of yourself all right."

Mike drained half the bottle in one gulp and looked around him. On three sides of the room huge canvas sheets, tacked on bare studding, provided makeshift walls. Blue sky showed through a rectangle in the ceiling. "Nice place you got here," he commented.

The bartender polished off a half-tumbler of whiskey and dried his mustache carefully with a towel. "It's drafty, but by the time the cold sets in, we ought to have her shipshape."

Finally Mike said, "Where does a fellow find this gold everybody's carrying on about?"

The bartender grinned and pointed to the east. "'Bout forty miles across those mountains there's a lake, Lake Bennett. There's two routes, White Pass and Chilkoot Pass. You can take your choice. One's as bad as the other. Now, if you don't freeze to death on the trail or fall into a crevasse, you reach Lake Bennett and build yourself a boat. It's a six hundred-mile jaunt down the Yukon. If you don't pile up in the rapids, you'll eventually get to Dawson.

That's where the gold is—so they say. You can't go wrong, just follow the crowd, son."

Mike scratched his red head. "How come you ain't trying for some of that gold yourself?"

The bartender slapped another bottle of cream soda on the bar. "'Cause I got my own private gold mine right here under the counter. In case I neglected to mention it, this here soda pop sells for a dollar a bottle."

"A dollar a bottle!" Mike roared. "You ain't serious?"

The bartender winked. "You're lucky you ain't drinking whiskey. You ever hear of supply and demand, son? Well, there ain't nothing natural but snow and ice in this god-forsaken place. When you're freezing your butt off out on the creeks come winter, there'll be times you'll be willing to trade your whole poke for an extra set of long underwear and a hot cup of tea."

Mike's shrewd blue eyes narrowed. "I think I see what you mean." He sighed, "Well, so long as I'm here, I figger I may as well mosey up that way and look things over."

"How big's your outfit?"

Mike turned his hands in on himself. "Just me."

"How are you fixed for equipment?"

"Just what you see."

The bartender groaned. "Talk about a lamb going to slaughter!"

Mike cut timber for the local sawmill until he had saved enough cash to equip himself for the journey over the mountains. He struck out on the trail that led over White Pass in the first week of October, one link in an antlike chain of humanity that moved steadily across the coastal mountains to the headwaters of the Yukon.

*. . . Then I got to figgering who he was, and wondering what he'd do,
And I turned my head—and there watching him
was the lady that's known as Lou.
His eyes went rubbering round the room, and he
seemed in a kind of daze,*

*Till at last that old piano fell in the way of his
wandering gaze.
The ragtime kid was having a drink; there was no
one else on the stool,
So the stranger stumbles across the room, and flops
down there like a fool.
In a buckskin shirt that was glazed with dirt he sat,
and I saw him sway;
Then he clutched the keys with his talon hands—
my God! but that man could play . . .*

The forty years between hadn't made any appreciable change in Klondike Mike Mahoney. His massive 6'2" frame was straight as an icicle; his weight had never fluctuated more than a few pounds from two hundred in that span of years. His flesh was hard and firm. Even the line of his prominent jaw was clean and youthful still. His weather-beaten skin was ageless. The sprinkling of white that lay in his close-cropped red hair might have been snow.

As he read, Mike gazed out over the auditorium trying to spot a familiar face. What ever had happened to old Jack McIntosh, he wondered. He had first met Jack at the camp on Lake Bennett. What a madhouse that had been! Frantic activity from sunrise to sunset, felling trees, splitting them into planks, and building boats for the long voyage down the Yukon. In another month the river would freeze over and the interior would be sealed up for the winter.

His first night at the lake Mike got into a campfire gab session with a party of four Scotchmen who had been having their troubles building a boat. Jack McIntosh, their leader, studied the husky young Irishman with interest. "Our outfit could use another strong back, young feller," he said. "Know anything about boats?"

"Well," Mike said, "I've lived and worked on rivers most of my life. I've helped build a few."

"You can join up with us if you'd like. We have enough food to cover another man for the winter."

"That sounds good to me," Mike said and stripped off his mackinaw. "Let's get to work."

By the end of the week two sturdy flat-bottomed scows began to take shape under Mike's direction. The bigger of the two was thirty feet long, eight feet wide, and four feet deep. "They say the Yukon's white water most of the way," Mike explained. "That means she's got to be sturdy, with a trim beam for maneuverability and with as little as possible under the water."

Both boats had pointed prows, heavily reinforced with the stoutest lumber. The green spruce planking of the hulls was calked with flour sacks boiled in spruce pitch.

The boats were launched in the first week of October with the ice a quarter of an inch thick on Lake Bennett. All about them, flimsier craft wallowed and foundered with split seams and smashed prows long before they reached the swift-flowing Yukon.

McIntosh patted Mike on the back. "You build a good boat, lad."

It was not the last time he had occasion to thank the providence that had brought them together. The splintered wrecks that dotted the rocky banks and shallows of the Yukon were grim symbols of inexperience and inferior equipment.

Mike proved to be a good navigator too. At White Horse, boats were backed up for almost a mile where the Yukon funneled into a narrow gorge with steep rock walls less than thirty feet apart. For more than a mile, the water went tumbling over a series of ledges like the pressurized stream of a fire hose washing down a flight of steps. Here a portage operation was called for. The supplies and equipment were unloaded and packed overland to the next navigable stretch of river, while the most foolhardy member of the party volunteered to take the empty boat through alone.

Mike couldn't resign himself to losing a valuable day's traveling time because of "these stinking little rapids," and

finally persuaded McIntosh to let him take the boats through fully loaded.

The Scotchman posted himself on a nearby hilltop to watch the show. He grew pale as the first of the two boats went whirling down the flume like a leaf in a drain spout and turned away from the sight quickly. After Mike had brought both boats through without incident, McIntosh broke out a bottle of rum and killed a quarter of it himself before he passed it around.

Mike and his crew stepped ashore in Dawson, headquarters of the Klondike, on the last day of October.

"Here it is, boys," said McIntosh. "The richest city in the world, man for man."

"I shouldn't wonder," Mike pointed to a sign quoting the latest prices on goods from the States in the window of a store: Nails—\$1.00 each; Longhandled shovels—\$20; Eggs—\$12 a dozen; Flour—\$400 a barrel. He whistled. "A man has to be rich to make a go of it at these rates. Hell, I could eat up a hundred dollars at breakfast, I bet."

Dawson was a far more solid-looking community than Skagway. It had two warehouses, two sawmills, six saloons, a crude hospital, two churches, and a Northwest Mounted Police post. Plank shacks and log cabins were rapidly replacing the tents in the residential section. The population, including Lousetown, the new section which had sprung up across the mouth of the Yukon, numbered about nine hundred. There were, perhaps, an equal number of prospectors camping out on the Klondike and its tributaries.

Mike acquired his first poke of gold dust, not panning in a creek, but working as a dockhand for the Northern Commercial Warehouse at \$1.50 an hour. At the end of the day when he reported to the paymaster's window, the clerk weighed out an ounce of gold dust on a small balance scale. "That comes to seventeen dollars, Mahoney," he said.

Dawson and Mike Mahoney hit it off from the start. His prodigious feats of strength at the docks were the talk of the town, as was his eccentricity—in a hard-drinking

community—of sipping cream soda at the bar. It was a standing joke around the taverns that Mike could get just as drunk on soda pop as any other man could on whiskey. The truth was that Mike was intoxicated by the carnival atmosphere of the town. Every night was Saturday night in Dawson. The saloons stayed open twenty-four hours a day to accommodate the steady stream of miners who gravitated in from the bleak, lonely gold-fields, with their pokes bulging and a thirst for liquor, companionship, a hot bath, and a soft bed; and maybe a buxom dance-hall girl to share the bed, if they were lucky and the poke could stand the gaff.

*... Then you've a hunch what the music meant ...
hunger and night and the stars.
And hunger, not of the belly kind that's banished
with bacon and beans,
But the gnawing hunger of lonely men for a home
and all that it means;
For a fireside far from the cares that are, four walls
and a roof above;
But oh! so cramful of cozy joy, and crowned with
a woman's love—
A woman dearer than all the world, and as true as
Heaven is true—
(God, how ghastly she looks through her rouge—
the lady that's known as Lou.)*

Mike remembered the dance-hall girls and smiled. There was Belinda Mulrooney, who knew how to play all the angles, and who started the Fairview House—the only hotel in Dawson with sheets on the beds. Belinda became a rich woman and married a French nobleman—a poor one. Then there was that cute little trick, Blondie, in Skagway, who had begged him to take her into the Klondike with him.

"I aim to hook one of those millionaires," she told him frankly. "And I'll do anything to get there. You take me with you, and I'll pay you a thousand in cash and . . ." she

slipped her hand inside his shirt and trailed it lightly across his chest. ". . . and my services will be available to you on the trail. It must get pretty lonesome and cold all by yourself in the snow."

Mike laughed and slapped her bottom playfully. "You're damned right it gets cold. So damned cold that *that* is the last thing any man thinks about on the trail."

Women, like other scarce commodities in the Klondike, had a high price attached to them. One night a chorus girl in the Dominion Saloon confided to Mike that she wanted to raise a stake and open a dance hall of her own. Unexpectedly, she placed her hand over his and said, "Handsome, what would it be worth to you if I kept your bed warm this winter?"

Mike extracted his hand as politely as he could and replied, "Nothing personal, Lucy, but I ain't accustomed to paying for my lovin'."

"You got me wrong," she said. "I wasn't talking about a one-night stand. I'll live with you for one year as your wife. I'll keep house for you, wash, sew, the works. Make me an offer—I'll accept any reasonable sum."

Mike threw back his head and laughed. "I ain't been in the Klondike *that* long, honey. Anyway, I bunk with four other fellows in a shack that ain't much bigger than a dog-house. What's more, I ain't got enough of a poke to interest you."

The girl shrugged. "Well, I wouldda liked it to be you, Handsome, but there are a couple of other fellows I think might be interested."

"I tell you," Mike said, "I think you're going about this the wrong way. It seems to me you should be out to make the best deal you can."

"What do you mean?"

He waved his hand around the room. "Some of these boys been camped on the creeks going on a year or more. I bet a little female companionship would be worth plenty to 'em next time around."

"Yeah," the girl said dryly. "What do you want me to do, advertise?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes. Look, what's the best way to get a good price for a horse you want to sell?"

"Well, *thanks!*"

"Now don't get huffy. You got to be practical about this. You want to sell a horse, you hold a public auction. Take bids, see?"

The girl began to giggle. "Mike, you're the limit. But maybe you got somethin' there." Her face grew serious. "There's only one thing that bothers me. Do you think it's ladylike?"

"Oh, for God's sake!" Mike sputtered. "Now I've heard everything!"

"All right," she said uncertainly. "I'll do it if you think it's the best way. How do I go about it though?"

Mike leaned forward confidentially. "Let me attend to everything. I'll pass the word around. Meanwhile, you go back to your room and fix yourself up real fancy. Understand?"

When Lucy returned to the saloon about a half-hour later, she was greeted with a mighty cheer. Mike had been a good press agent. Before she knew what was happening, a reception committee swept her off her feet and onto the bar, which had been cleared for the occasion. Mike Mahoney leaped up nimbly beside her, held up his hands, and called for order.

"Look sexy," he whispered to her out of the corner of his mouth. The girl posed with her hand on her hips, one knee bent coyly in front of the other, and her bosom thrust forward. She wore an expensive costume imported from France, cut low in front and tight as skin. The flouncing skirt was short in front and gave the men crowding around the bar a good view of her legs, which were enhanced by red spike-heeled shoes and black-net silk stockings.

Mike reviewed the rules of the contest for the benefit of the new arrivals who had been pushing into the Dominion during the past half-hour; news traveled fast in Daw-

son. Not only was the saloon packed to capacity, but an exuberant crowd was milling around the front door.

The rules were simple: For a sum, and to a party determined by auction, Miss Lucy would contract—an agreement signed before witnesses and for cash on the line—to sew, cook, clean, wash, and perform all the other common household and wifely duties for a period of 365 days from the present date.

The bidding was fast and furious at the beginning. In no time at all it had climbed to \$2,500. Then there was a lull. "Gentlemen," Mike cajoled, "look at that waist—twenty inches!"

"Twenty-eight hundred," a perspiring Irishman yelled.

"A natural blonde," Mike lied.

A thin prospector clutched his poke of dust nervously, "Three thousand!"

"As affectionate as a kitten," Mike went on doggedly.

An impetuous Frenchman slapped his bag of gold on the bar. "Four thousand and that's my final bid."

The girl flexed her long legs. "Forty-five hundred," a white-bearded man said quickly.

She wriggled her hips.

"Forty-six!"

"Forty-eight!"

"Five thousand!" the Frenchman shrieked in a voice quivering with emotion. It was the final bid.

"Going . . . going . . . gone!" Mike rapped his heel sharply on the bar. "Sold to the man from Eldorado Creek!" The Dominion vibrated with shouts and stomping. The Frenchman reached up and swept his prize off the bar.

"The drinks are on the house!" somebody shouted, and the excited bartender found himself seconding the motion.

*. . . The music almost died away . . . then it burst
like a pent-up flood;
And it seemed to say, "Repay, repay," and my eyes
were blind with blood.*

*The thought came back of an ancient wrong, and it
stung like a frozen lash,
And the lust awoke to kill, to kill . . . then the music
stopped with a crash,
And the stranger turned, and his eyes they burned
in a most peculiar way . . .*

Mike studied the solemn faces before him. There were moments when he imagined he could detect a flash of the old sourdough in them, but then it would be gone quickly like a Klondike mist. But they'd never shake it off completely. It would always show through—through the \$200 suits, the fifty dollar shoes; all the fancy manicures in the world wouldn't get the gold dust out from under their nails.

The gold dust—the whole world had revolved around it in 1897. It had taken a long time to convince *him* though. He thought about the time he and Jack McIntosh had been drinking at the Dominion bar—cream soda for Mike—and what he had told Jack.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking since I been here, Jack. Fellows come here looking for a quick buck, but the last place they'll find it is on the creeks. Only one claim out of a dozen ever amounts to anything worthwhile. Anyways, gold ain't worth any more than what you can do with it, and you can't do much with it here. . . . The real gold is in stuff like this." He lifted his glass to the light and sloshed the amber soda water around in it; he indicated the whiskey bottle behind the bar; he fingered the lapel of his mackinaw. "Goods, that's where the money is."

McIntosh studied the younger man with new respect. "You sure there ain't some Scotch on your mother's side, Mike? That's right practical talk for an Irishman."

"It's common sense. I bet there ain't more than ten per cent of the cheechakos who reach the Klondike ever get to work a claim of their own. Mostly they work somebody else's diggings, like big Alec MacDonald's, for fifteen dollars a day. Hell, I coulda stayed at Skagway and done better than that cutting timber."

McIntosh frowned. "Does that mean you ain't gonna go up the creek with us come spring?"

"I ain't sure yet, Jack. If I could get a lead on some kind of a business . . ." He grinned ". . . Well, I'd let you other fellows dig my dust for me."

Later that month, because of the overcrowded living conditions in the McIntosh party's 12 x 14 cabin, Mike moved in with a lone prospector, Johnny Gavin, who had a shack close by. It was Johnny who put the idea of a freight service into his head.

"There's a thousand sourdoughs camped out on those creek claims," Gavin said. "They always got stuff coming out from town. You could pack in store goods on your own too, and be sure of selling it. A good dog team can lug up to half a ton. When you had room, you could even carry passengers."

"Sounds fine, but I don't know anything about driving a dog sled. Besides, where would I get the dogs? From what I hear, they come steep, as much as \$500."

"You can use my two huskies, Scotty and Glossy," Gavin told him. "Scotty's a top lead dog. Let's pass the word around town and see what happens."

Within the week, a prospector named McLeod offered Mike his pet husky, Goldie, for a fifty dollar loan. Belinda Mulrooney gave him a big tawny mutt she had inherited from an admirer. Gavin supplied another he won in a poker game. And Mike filled out his team with a sixth, which he bought cheap from an Indian.

On his maiden voyage, Mike hauled four hundred pounds of supplies up to the claims on Bonanza Creek. It was an easy run, a few miles up the frozen Klondike, then along the banks of the Bonanza to Grand Forks. The round trip took about three days.

By the middle of December, business was so good that he was on the trail thirty days a month, weather permitting. He preferred to travel at night whenever he could, to protect his eyes from the glare of sunlight on snow and ice. But even in the early hours of the morning, the trail

was seldom darker than an overcast day in the temperate zone. Stars, moon, and northern lights bathed the white landscape in a perpetual eerie brilliance.

Mike was clearing fifty dollars a day, above his overhead, and he was expanding all the while. He transported a variety of passengers at twenty-five dollars a head; sick or injured miners back to the hospital, a doctor or policeman going out to the claims.

On one occasion, a virile prospector, who had been out on Eldorado Creek for eighteen long, lonely months, got down on his knees and begged Mike to bring him a woman on his next trip.

"I heard about that auction you ran at the Dominion Saloon, Mike," he said, "and I figured maybe you could fix me up the same way. I can't afford to pay her any \$5,000, but I might manage \$2,000."

"Well," Mike scratched his chin, "I'll see what I can do for you, friend." He coughed delicately. "You realize, this ain't going to be exactly easy for me. I'd have to get a decent commission to make it pay."

"What did you have in mind?"

"Say ten per cent?"

"That's \$200, Mike! It's robbery." They dickered for about ten minutes, and finally Mike agreed to a unique arrangement.

"You'll pay me one dollar per pound, is that right?"

"Stripped," the miner amended.

"That's no good," Mike explained patiently. "You don't think she's gonna climb on that scale in the Northern Commercial Warehouse stark naked, with an army of dockhands and clerks gawking at her do you?"

"I suppose not," the man admitted.

"You pay for whatever she's got on her back—plus the regular rates for her baggage." Reluctantly the miner shook hands on it.

Seven days later Mike delivered the goods to his door—a buxom brunette who tipped the beam at an even two hundred pounds.

"You got your ten per cent anyway, Mike," the customer said as he paid the tab. "But I can't kick. I sure got my money's worth." He rubbed his hands together gleefully and slammed the door.

Near the middle of December, the manager of the Northern Commercial told Mike: "What we need most in this godforsaken place now is mail service."

"The steamers bring mail in," Mike said.

"Yeah, two or three times during the summer. What I mean is a regular service between Dawson and Skagway. That would be a real link with the outside world. A man wouldn't get so homesick during these long winters if he got news from home once in a while. A good dog team could do it, Mike."

Mike shook his head. "It's 650 miles to Skagway. That would take at least a month. I'd have to pack food for the dogs and myself, not to mention firewood and blankets. That would come to five hundred pounds of dead weight."

The manager's eyes narrowed. "You could still carry five hundred pounds of mail. At a dollar an ounce that would come to \$8,000 a trip."

"Seeing as you put it that way, I'll do it," Mike said.

Each of the 650 miles to Skagway was a brutal test of endurance for man and dogs. Frequently Mike had to break trail through waist-deep snow at the head of the team, averaging less than two miles an hour. When the drifts became impassable, they had to swing down on the frozen Yukon, where buckling ice threw up a saw-toothed forest of icy pinnacles.

Mike had to chop a path through this barrier with an ax. And there was never any respite from the fifty-below-zero cold and the wind that needled the fine sandy snow into his face with the searing force of a sandblasting machine.

He stopped for only one meal a day; fat bacon fried in a skillet; a heavy flapjack fried in the grease, and a handful of beans, all washed down with a can of scalding tea. (The fermented yeast dough that went into the flapjack

was the Klondike prospector's most important staple, and from it he derived his nickname—sourdough.)

Fifteen days after he had started out, Mike reined in the team at the top of Chilkoot Pass, where a twelve hundred-foot icy chute dipped down into the coastal valley. He unhitched the dogs, climbed on the back of the sled, and pushed off.

"Let's go fellers!" he yelled to his team, as the heavily-loaded sled shot down the slope like a comet with a man riding its tail, with the dogs slipping and sliding and yelping excitedly in its wake.

Mike was as surprised to see Skagway as Skagway was to see him. The boom town that greeted him with a hero's welcome was not recognizable as the tent city of four months before. There were block after block of new buildings, streets with wooden sidewalks, teeming with people; and women—not of the dance-hall variety—with children, the real stamp of a permanent community. Music blared out of a score of saloons and restaurants.

Mike was regarded as something of a hero. Jim Evans, chief clerk of the Northern Commercial Store in Skagway, climbed onto the bar in the Pack Train Saloon and formally introduced him to the patrons.

"I want you to meet Mike Mahoney from the Klondike," he said. "Klondike Mike, the greatest dog driver in the North, the first man to run the mail in from Dawson. And with it \$50,000 in gold dust and nuggets." A mighty cheer went up.

Mike tugged at Evans' trousers. "It was only one hundred pounds," he whispered self-consciously.

Mike and Evans made the rounds of every joint in town that night, with Evans getting drunker and more loquacious with each stop. They finished the tour at Jeff's Place, owned and operated by the notorious gambler, con man, and gang leader, Jefferson Randolph (Soapy) Smith.

In all his life, Mike had never been in a café like Jeff's Place.

"Back in the States," he told Evans, "they wouldn't let

a roughneck like me in a classy joint like this." His muddy boots sank into ankle-deep carpeting. He stared with awe at the artificial palm trees, mirrored walls, and murals. There were private tables near the stage at the rear of the main saloon, isolated by hand-painted screens. A five-piece orchestra serenaded the patrons.

Evans introduced him to an array of notable people: "Klondike just delivered \$200,000 in gold from Dawson," he would boast casually.

Finally, Mike took him aside. "Listen, Jim," he said, his face red with embarrassment. "You know what \$200,000 in gold weighs? About a half-ton. Even *my* team ain't that good."

Soapy Smith himself came over to meet Mike and to extend the hospitality of the house. Mike was impressed, and a bit surprised. "Hell," he later told Evans. "He looks more like a parson than he does a badman."

Evans winked. "Yeah? Well you can bet your boots that if he had known beforehand about that gold you were bringing in, you'd be lying stiff in a drift along the trail, 'stead of sitting here tonight."

Sometime during the revelry, Mike paused to kibitz at a card game going on in one corner. He didn't have to watch very long to discover that a mousy little prospector, carrying a big poke and a bigger load, was the mark of the other four players. When he dropped \$500 in a single pot, Mike decided to intervene.

"My friend here has had enough poker for the time being," he announced to the four sharpies. Slipping his hands under the armpits of the little man, he lifted him out of the chair and steered him over to the bar, ignoring the protests of the other card players. The sucker was too far gone to resist.

"Give my friend here one for the road," he ordered the bartender.

Mike was suddenly aware that the other patrons at the bar were drawing away from them. He glanced in the mirror on the back wall and saw a mountainous-looking

bouncer advancing on him. He whirled just in time to duck a fist clubbed at his head. In the accepted rough-and-tumble rules of barroom fighting, Mike landed a kick to the groin. The bouncer screamed and clutched at his belly. Mike grasped the edge of the bar at his back with his two hands and kicked mule-fashion with both feet. The bouncer went slamming back over a table. The little prospector, sobered by the excitement, yelled a warning.

"Look out behind you!"

Mike spun as the bartender swung a blackjack at his head. He caught the man's arm in mid-air and jerked him across the bar. He slugged him once and gave him the same mule kick he had delivered to the bouncer. As four more husky bouncers converged on him, he vaulted onto the bar.

"Come on, boys," he invited. "Even money I can tear off a man's head with one kick." The bouncers hesitated, eyeing the heavy boots and the bulging muscles in his thighs.

"All right, I'll handle this!" an authoritative voice cut through the bedlam. Soapy Smith pushed his way through the mob to the bar. "Get lost, boys," he told the bouncers, then turned to Mike. "I'd like a word with you, Mr. Mahoney, in my office." Mike nodded and leaped nimbly to the floor.

When they were seated in his private office, Soapy lectured Mike severely. "This kind of thing does my business no good whatsoever, Mahoney. If it had been anybody else but you, I would have had him dumped into the harbor in a sack."

"I'm sorry about that ruckus, but I didn't start it," Mike explained. "Them fellers were cheating that old guy right and left. You oughtn't to allow a game like that in your place."

Soapy peeled the wrapper from a thin green cigar. "Mr. Mahoney," he said patiently, "for your information them fellers are in my employ. It's their job to skin old fools like that."

Mike was appalled. "But they play dishonest!"

Soapy smiled tolerantly. "On the contrary. I look upon it as charity. Consider what an old sourdough like that gets for his money in my establishment. Exquisite cuisine, the finest liquor, soothing music, a good floor show, beautiful girls who don't put up a fuss over a pinch or a squeeze, and stimulating drinking and poker companions."

"I know," Mike protested, "but—"

"Allow me to finish, please. Do you know what would happen to him in a so-called honest place? He'd have the dubious privilege of drinking raw whiskey in dull surroundings; he'd win or lose a few bucks in an honest game; then he'd go staggering off to some cat house where the girls would roll him and dump him into an alley to sober up. Assuming, of course, that a few of the local toughs didn't slit his throat and lift his poke long before that. It's always the same with these old sourdoughs. They either end up broke, or dead, or both. Now there's one thing about Jeff's Place; you may go home broke, but you go happy—and healthy."

For over an hour Mike listened as Soapy talked at length about life and morals in the Yukon. The gambler finally terminated the discussion by offering him a job as bouncer in his establishment. Mike said a polite no-thank-you and left. He was undecided whether he was awed, amused, or disgusted by Soapy Smith; or maybe a little of each.

*. . . Then I ducked my head, and the lights went
out, and two guns blazed in the dark,
And a woman screamed, and the lights went up,
and two men lay stiff and stark.
Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was
dangerous Dan McGrew,
While the man from the Creeks lay clutched to the
breast of the lady that's known as Lou . . .*

They were yawning now, out in front. "Stuffed shirts," Mike cursed silently. "Faces look like they'd crack if they

smiled." It hadn't been like that once. It used to be a big joke if a feller broke his leg—anything for a laugh. And they had done some damn fool things, himself included. Like that episode with the Sunny Samson Sisters' Sextette.

He had taken a short vacation in Seattle after one of his runs to Dawson. On the trip back, he had become infatuated with a theatrical troupe that performed in the ship's lounge during the supper hour. The Sunny Samson Sisters' Sextette featured six of the cutest, blonde, blue-eyed little girls Mike had ever seen. They were versatile musicians and they sang the popular songs of the day in sweet childish voices. The girls fairly oozed kittenish femininity.

Whenever they came mincing along the deck in their big puff sleeves and voluminous petticoats, done up in satin and lace from head to toe and looking like fragile Dresden dolls, Mike would sigh. "They look good enough to eat," he told their manager, Hal Henry, with whom he shared a cabin. "What a sensation they'd be in Dawson."

Henry, an impresario from Brooklyn, thought about that a while, then made Mike a proposition. "I'll pay you \$5,000 to take us back with you to the Klondike."

Mike was shocked. "Are you serious? Why them delicate little creatures would curl up and die inside of twelve hours on a sled at fifty below zero. I wouldn't do it for \$10,000."

Henry called up his reinforcements. It took the Sunny Samson Sisters just ten minutes to break Mike down.

He agreed to take them to Dawson for \$3,000 in cash, plus one-third of the gate receipts for as long as they remained in the Yukon.

The project was fraught with trouble from the beginning. Among them, the Sunny Samson Sisters had a wardrobe that could have outfitted every woman in Dawson for life. Then there were their musical instruments: violins, horns, clarinets, trombones, a bull fiddle, and an upright piano. Mike arranged for three freight sleds to carry the

equipment and two passenger sleds for the girls and Hal Henry.

The total cost of the operation ran to \$6,000, which meant he had to make up a \$3,000 deficit out of his own money.

The piano posed the biggest problem. It was virtually impossible for a dog team to pull a loaded sled up the twelve hundred-foot, forty-two-degree incline of the Chil-koot Chute. At this point, porters had to pack freight over the top on their backs. But there was no amount of money large enough to induce them to lug the Sunny Samson Sisters' piano up the precarious grade.

"We'll have to leave it behind," Mike said philosophically.

"Never!" Hal Henry exploded. "If it don't go, we don't go."

"That ain't reasonable!" Mike pleaded. "There are plenty of pianos in Dawson."

"This piano I had made special in Brooklyn," Henry said adamantly. "You can't beat a Brooklyn piano."

"What do you want me to do?" Mike said desperately. "Carry it up on my back?"

"That's an idea," Henry said. "It's only a small piano."

"Small like a house," Mike muttered. He turned to a couple of porters standing nearby. "Think we can rig up a shoulder harness for this baby?"

Within the hour Mike was ready to go. Three porters hoisted the piano gingerly onto his back while he slipped his arms through the harness. He took a deep breath. "O.K., boys, let 'er go." He tested the weight and balance for a few minutes.

"How does she feel?" Johnny Evans asked anxiously. Johnny had accompanied them to the pass for a proper send-off.

"Like I said before—like a house."

"There's a photographer due here in another hour or so," Johnny said. "Why don't you wait and get your picture taken with that thing?"

"The longer that piano stays here, the madder I get," Mike said between gritted teeth.

Hal Henry patted the piano lovingly. "Be careful you don't drop her, Mahoney. I'd hate to see anything happen to this baby."

"Go to hell!" Mike said and staggered into the line of porters who were moving single file across the pass. Although it was only the last week in February, the trail was crowded with the vanguard of the 1898 rush.

The first one hundred yards were the roughest. Mike took each step like a child learning to walk, putting one foot down tentatively and testing it before he advanced the other foot. The porters piled up behind him, keeping at a safe distance, all set to dump their loads and dive into the snowbanks on either side of the trail at the first sign of trouble. Sweat stood out like ball bearings on Mike's forehead, but his legs felt solid, and after the first fifty feet, he began to gain confidence. A quarter of the way up he stopped and eased the piano down carefully into a snowbank. He rested for a minute and was on his way again, moving along at a good rate now. Three more times he stopped and rested. A mob of porters and Redcoats, lined up on the crest of the hill, cheered him into the stretch. A final burst of energy took him over the top and two hundred yards down the straightaway to the customs check point.

The chief inspector came out of his shack to see what all the shouting was about. "What do you have there, Mahoney?" he asked, eyeing the piano curiously.

Between gasps Mike managed to blurt out, "Piano . . . Sunny . . . Samson . . . Sisters' . . . Sextette . . ."

"Sunny, Sexy, Sisters! What in hell are you talking about?"

Johnny Evans and Hal Henry, who had just arrived, enlightened the inspector on the projected theatrical tour into the Yukon. When they were half through, his face turned pale.

"Are you out of your mind, Mahoney?" he roared. "Six

chorus girls! Into the Yukon! By dog sled! I might as well give you a permit to shoot them on the spot. Never, Mahoney! Never!" And no amount of pleading and arguing could change his mind.

When the inspector had gone back into the shack and slammed the door, Hal Henry tapped Mike on the shoulder. "Come on, Mahoney," he said curtly. "Let's get that piano down the hill." If it had not been for alert troopers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Chilkoot Pass might have witnessed its first murder that morning.

. . . These are the simple facts of the case, and I guess you ought to know.

They say that the stranger was crazed with "hootch" and I'm not denying it's so . . .

Halfway through the final stanza, the doubt struck Mike; and what about me? Have I gotten as far away from the old Klondike as the others? Has money in the bank changed me? God knows, I never went looking for it.

What he made from the freight service and his contract with the Dominion government to carry the mail had always been enough for him. In the summer he had worked in the local sawmill, and, sometimes when things were slow, he hired out as a digger on the creeks.

Despite the fact that thousands of cheechakos who flocked to the Klondike never struck it rich, they could always make a living digging for the successful prospectors. Big Alec MacDonald, who held forty claims, kept over a thousand men on his payroll alone. Wages were good; \$1.50 an hour, plus a few handfuls of the "dump" at quitting time. A digger could make up to fifty dollars a day.

Some of the newcomers opened up businesses in town. Overnight, Dawson had become a major city. By the middle of the summer of 1898, there were a tailor shop, a real estate agency, a florist, a dress shop, a beauty parlor, a fruit store, a theater, a music hall, and two locally-printed newspapers.

Mike could always pick up a purse fighting on the local cards at the Academy Theater and the music hall when he

needed some extra cash. Through the long winter, when recreation was limited principally to poker and women, a fad for boxing developed in Dawson. The sourdoughs followed the fortunes of all the headliners in the States and Canada with the enthusiasm of small boys. Bookmakers handled thousands of dollars in bets on the big championship fights. Tex Rickard, a bartender at the Monte Carlo Saloon, was the local promoter.

Mike never went out of his way to look for gold. But in the spring of 1899, three gamblers whom he had grubstaked a year before came to him with a tip. "There's a fraction open for staking down next to our claim at forty-two below on Dominion," they told him. "We wanted you to get first crack at it. That's good property down there."

According to the law, five hundred feet was the maximum frontage that could be staked out on any claim on the creeks. Sometimes a prospector would try and squeeze out some additional footage, or, quite innocently, be guilty of an error in judgment—accurate measurements were difficult to make on the uneven terrain. Government surveyors eventually checked on all claims, at which time they would lop off the illegal footage. Often between two adjacent claims there would lie a "fraction"—as it was called—of twenty-five or fifty feet.

Mike filed his claim on a small wedge of land at forty-two below on Dominion Creek and started to work it. In three weeks he took out over \$4,000 in nuggets, barely scratching a heavy vein of metal that ran straight down the middle of the claim. The doctors who owned a claim on the other side of his offered him \$100,000 in cash to sell out to them. Mike grabbed it and lost it all, along with \$18,000 of his own savings, in the Jack Wade Stampede a few months later.

He accepted his loss philosophically. "I still got my freight and mail routes."

But he hadn't reckoned on the rapid advance of civilization on the Klondike. By the fall of 1899, Dawson was

linked to the coast by roads and telegraph lines. The stage-coach made the sled obsolete.

When the news of a big gold strike at Nome, Alaska, reached the outside world, Mike was one of the first to hit the trail.

As soon as the first steamer docked in Nome, he was back in business again with his sled and dog team.

He met a lot of old friends in Alaska, including Tex Rickard, who was tending bar in the Northern Saloon. After Mike cooled off two bruisers who were breaking up the joint one Saturday night, Tex renewed his persistent efforts to lure him into the prize ring.

One night when Mike dropped into the Northern to shoot the breeze, Tex introduced him to a powerful-looking man who was standing at the bar having a drink.

"Tommy," he told the stranger, "I want you to meet Klondike Mike, the champion rough-and-tumble scrapper in the North . . . Mike, this here is Tommy Burns. He's pretty handy with his dukes too."

Mike and Burns hit it off right from the start. They talked for a while over drinks about gold and boxing, until Tex Rickard interrupted them.

"Listen, boys," he suggested. "How about putting on a little exhibition for the crowd?" Neither Mike nor Burns were particularly enthused over the idea, but in the face of strong coaxing from the other men at the bar, they were hard put to refuse.

"No gloves, bare hands," Tex announced. Both men nodded.

"Rough-and-tumble rules?" Mike asked, and looked questioningly at Burns..

"That means you can use your feet," Tex explained.

Burns shrugged and smiled, "I'll play it your way, Mike." He later admitted that at the time Mike's feet were the least of his worries; he didn't intend to give him a chance to get set up for any kicking. Both contestants put up fifty dollars apiece with Tex Rickard, then marched into a back room along with twenty or thirty spectators. A center space

was cleared, and they squared off. The match was scheduled for ten two-minute rounds.

Mike opened the battle with a wild roundhouse. Burns ducked and hooked a right to the chin. Mike flailed the air futilely with both hands, and Burns snapped his head back with an uppercut. Burns circled his man, his left working on Mike's nose like a piston; he slipped a straight left and crossed a hard right to Mike's jaw. The spectators scattered as Mike crashed back into the wall. Burns swarmed all over him with a flurry of short shots to the body.

Mike was covering up helplessly when the round ended.

In the second round Mike let Burns carry the fight to him. Burns moved in cautiously, tying up the big sourdough effectively in close, and putting together some beautiful combinations. Mike cocked his right and stepped in, poking out his jaw deliberately. Burns couldn't resist the fat target. Dropping his guard, he put everything he had into a right to the button. At the same time Mike let go with his right. The punches landed simultaneously. Their knees buckled, but they both held their ground. For the last thirty seconds they slugged it out toe to toe.

They were both grateful when Tex Rickard bawled, "Time!"

Mike got cute in the third round. As they met in the middle of the room, he kicked up at Burns' jaw. Burns pulled his head back, and the foot flashed harmlessly past his face. He pushed hard with the heel of his hand against the sole of Mike's boot. A roar of laughter went up as Mike went flying through the air and landed flat on his back.

Before Rickard could start a count, Mike climbed to his feet shakily. Burns moved in quickly for the kill. Slamming away at the head and body, he drove Mike back across the room. Mike hit the wall and bounced off, hooking both hands to the head. The blows stunned Burns for a moment. And in that moment the Klondike champion drew back his foot and got off a perfect punt to the solar plexus. Burns dropped like a stone, and that was the end of the fight.

Later, after he had recovered, Burns came over and

shook Mike's hand. "You're the best natural fighter I ever saw, Mike. I'd like to take you back to the States with me. How about it?"

Mike grinned, fingering a welt on his jaw and a mouse under his left eye. "No thanks, Tom. I'd like to die in bed. Anyways, I was just lucky. I don't think I could have stood up for another round if it hadn't ended when it did."

Lucky or not, it was quite a distinction to KO a man who was shortly thereafter to become the heavyweight champion of the world.

In 1905 Mike joined the rush to Fairbanks. It was there that he made the big killing. Another tip on a fraction did the trick; it turned out to be a real bonanza. Soon he was hauling out ten thousand dollars in dust and nuggets every month.

There wasn't much else to the story. In 1909 he married a pretty nurse from St. Joseph's Hospital in Fairbanks. He expanded his holdings, and in 1910 he sold out for better than one million dollars. Then it was back to civilization and the birth of "Mister" Michael Mahoney—a millionaire at thirty-six. Klondike Mike was buried, only to be exhumed on the rare occasions when the International Association of Sourdoughs met.

But now from the way it appeared to Mike, the spirit had departed for good.

*I'm not as wise as the lawyer guys, but strictly
between us two—*

*The woman that kissed him—and pinched his poke
—was the lady—that's known as Lou.*

Mike closed the book abruptly and started off the stage to the accompaniment of light applause.

He had only taken a few steps when a young reporter in the press row got to his feet. "Mr. Mahoney, may I ask you a question?"

Mike stopped and turned curiously. He had noticed the young man while he was reading, a bright-looking chap,

slouched in his chair with a smug smile on his face. Finally he grinned. "Sure, you can. Shoot."

"Is it true, sir," the reporter began too politely, "that you actually witnessed the shooting that inspired Service to write 'The Shooting of Dan McGrew'?"

Mike hesitated; there was something about the fellow that made him uneasy. Almost reluctantly he answered, "That is true."

For years Mike Mahoney had been recognized as the world's foremost authority on that classic and controversial crime. Reputedly, he had been standing less than ten feet away from Dan and the stranger when they blasted each other into eternity. If he were coaxed, Mike could relate some colorful and exciting sidelights to the incident. Those who had heard his commentaries, even many times over, never grew tired of them. He had the Irish knack for spinning a yarn, and, with each telling, you could depend on it that he would think of additional details and vary the telling a little—just enough to keep it from growing stale and uninteresting.

"Well," said the reporter pleasantly, "for almost thirty years people have been arguing about whether or not the poem is factual or fictional. Was there ever a Dan McGrew? Or a lady named Lou? Was there even a Malamute Saloon?"

There was a stir of interest among the exsourdoughs present.

The reporter smiled condescendingly and continued: "Anyway, I got to thinking about it a couple of months back. Why all the arguing back and forth, I asked myself? There's one man who could settle it once and for all. That's Robert Service. So I decided to ask him. He's living in France as you probably know. So I wrote him a letter." He inclined his head toward Mike. "With your permission, I'd like to read his answer to the gentlemen assembled here."

Mike's forehead puckered, but he said quickly, "Of course."

The reporter took a letter from his pocket, unfolded it leisurely, and began to read.

When he had finished, the nervous squeak of shoe leather and the creaking of the wooden chairs intruded harshly on the heavy hush that had settled over the hall.

"So you see," the reporter said triumphantly, "Mr. Service states that the poem was a complete product of his imagination. There never was a Dan McGrew or a lady named Lou, or anybody that even remotely resembled them." He smiled. "As they say on the flyleaves of the novels, 'Any resemblance between the characters in this story and actual parties living or dead is purely coincidental.'" He turned back to Mike. "I want to present this letter from Robert Service to the International Association of Sourdoughs, so that the members may peruse it, personally, at their convenience."

Mike Mahoney shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other on the platform. His face was growing red. "Well sure, son . . . You know, I . . ." He was brought up short by a voice from the rear of the auditorium.

"Mr. President, may I have the floor for a moment?"

All eyes focused on a tall gray-haired man who had risen from his seat in the middle of the auditorium. He was quickly recognized as the chairman of the bar association in a big midwestern state.

"Young man," he addressed the reporter severely, "are you calling Mr. Mahoney a liar?"

"Well—I—that is, you heard what Mr. Service says . . ." Momentarily flustered, the reporter hesitated.

"That's a pretty serious accusation, you know," the lawyer shot back. "Before you stick your neck out any further, I think it may interest you to know that on the night in question—the night Dan McGrew was shot—I was standing less than five feet away from Klondike Mike at the bar in the Malamute Saloon. I will gladly testify in court to the accuracy of his account of the shooting."

The reporter blinked and shook his head as if someone had thrown dust in his eyes. His voice squeaked, "But—but—but Mr. Service *wrote* that poem!"

"I can't vouch for Mr. Service's memory, young man, but

I can and do vouch for the infallibility of Mr. Mahoney's," was the lawyer's cool reply.

An eminent doctor in the front row stood up. "I too was in the Malamute that fateful night. Matter of fact I was drinking with Mike Mahoney at the bar. I had just finished paying for a round of drinks when the shooting started. In the excitement, I forgot about it and paid for the next round too. And would you believe it, that welcher didn't say a word about it. Just let me pay for his round too." He sniffed indignantly in the direction of Mike Mahoney.

All around the hall, the old sourdoughs began to pop up to back up Mike's story:

"I was playing poker over in the corner, saw the whole thing. Some bastard tipped the table over. And just when I had four aces too."

"You think *you* had trouble! You know, I had been working on Lou for months. The fact is, she was double-dealing McGrew too. I finally got her to the point where she let me put my hand on her knee. I would have made the grade that night for sure if that poor bastard hadn't come in and botched things up. What a woman she was!"

"You want facts, you ask me. I was the ragtime kid who played piano at the Malamute."

The young reporter slumped down in his seat foggy-eyed. Only slightly less shocked was Mike Mahoney, as the yarn-swapping flew back and forth across the room, each one more fantastic than the other. Before his gaze, the aged men in the room underwent a remarkable transformation. Reserve and dignity faded. Eloquence carefully cultivated through the years degenerated into mining camp vernacular. Eyes dimmed by age and boredom came alive; jowls and wrinkles seemed to melt away as if, by some phenomenon of will, the old prospectors had turned back the clock.

Klondike Mike grinned and shook his head, too choked up for words. This called for a drink—and this time it wouldn't be cream soda.



The Beans Lasted Three Days

For twelve days Wilson Sessoms was adrift in a tiny row-boat. For nine days he had no food or water. For eight days he was alone with the memory of the dead friend he'd had to throw to the sharks.

DICK BROWN

Douglas Wilson Sessoms of Laurinburg, North Carolina, known by his middle name, lived through an experience that would have killed most men, or driven them mad. For twelve days he drifted helplessly on the Atlantic Ocean in a small, leaky open boat. For nine of those twelve days, with sharks hovering in the background like avenging fates, Sessoms went without a bite of food or a drop of water. For eight of those days, Sessoms was alone, his only company the unrelenting sun, the cruel whiplash spray of salt water, and the memory of a decaying corpse that once had been a friend.

The fishing trip started off uneventfully on Saturday, October 28, 1956. Sessoms and Eddie Boone, a thirty-four-year-old tree surgeon in Laurinburg for whom Sessoms worked, decided to go for a weekend of fishing along the North Carolina coast. Boone had done a great deal of coastal fishing, but for Sessoms it would be his maiden voyage.

"You'll never forget this, Wilson," Boone told his young companion. "This is the greatest fishing in the world. You're gonna enjoy yourself."

The two started out well before daybreak that Saturday morning. They stored all their fishing equipment in the back of Eddie Boone's truck alongside the boat, a plywood

affair that Boone and Sessoms and some of their friends had built in their spare time. The name of the boat was the *Nail Keg*. She was sixteen feet long and four feet wide. She had no seats; just a board on either end and room to hang an outboard motor. She was a simple-looking little boat, devoid of frills, but she looked sturdy enough.

It was hard for Sessoms and Boone to tell just how the weather would turn out as they reached the "rocks" near Southport, North Carolina. It was just after daybreak when they dropped their lines in the channel water, hoping to catch some blues. The sky was moodily overcast with big gray balloons of clouds overhead. The wind was rising. The water was still, although you could tell the sea was going to be churning a little bit before the morning was over. Sessoms began to feel nervous.

"Looks like we might have a little bad weather, Eddie," he said warily. "Should we pull in for a while?"

"I've been out when the weather was a lot worse," Boone replied, trying to reassure his buddy and at the same time keep his mind on the fishing. "This is nothing. Don't be a worrier, Wilson."

"I'm not worried. It's just that I don't like the looks of the weather."

Boone laughed, "That means you're worrying. I tell you, this is nothing."

The water in the wide sheltered mouth of the Cape Fear River off Southport got choppy as the morning spent itself, but the two continued to fish. By mid-morning, neither man had felt as much as a twinge on his line, so they decided to knock off for breakfast. They hauled into Southport and ate orange juice, ham and eggs, and coffee; then they went out and bought a can of gasoline. A spare can of gasoline would come in handy, Boone told Sessoms, in case they ran into any trouble.

They also bought three cans of pork and beans and three bottles of soft drinks. They figured they would have the beans and soda pop for lunch on the boat.

The fish were still not biting when Sessoms and Boone

returned to the channel. The dark water began to behave badly, like a cranky child before a nap. Sessoms felt better than he had though. Getting back on land and filling his stomach had reassured him. Besides, if they could haul in once without trouble, he reasoned, there was no reason why they couldn't do it again.

At noon, Sessoms opened a bottle of soda and shared it with Boone.

"Let's save the beans awhile," he said. "We might get hungry a little later."

Boone, who was concentrating on his fishing anyway, thought it was a good idea. But he began to get disgusted at his bad luck.

"Let's try some trolling outside the breakers," he said.

"Sure," said Sessoms, "why not?"

It started to rain slightly, and the wind rose another notch.

Just as the *Nail Keg* crossed the last breaker, a wave broke over the small open boat; then another. The motor cut dead. The only tools the fishermen had with them were pocket knives, so they didn't know how they were going to make any repairs. Boone got hold of the small anchor and tried to knock the top off the motor. He accomplished nothing, except that he broke the anchor and one of the motor belts.

"Oh, the hell with it," he said. "We're bound to drift ashore anyway. Let's just sit back and take life easy."

Boone sat back and tried to fish while Sessoms continued to tinker with the motor. He worked at it without success for over an hour. All the while he could see people on the beach, so he didn't think there was anything to worry about.

Then, suddenly, Boone looked up and his face went white. "Damn it, we're drifting out to sea."

Boone was right. The sixteen-foot *Nail Keg* was drifting helplessly through the heaving waters of narrow Corncake Inlet into the open Atlantic. Sessoms and Boone waved and shouted at the top of their voices, hoping that the people

on the beach would notice them. It was now 5:00 P.M., and darkness was closing in on the ocean, the small boat, and its two frightened occupants.

It is logical to assume that had the two men been sighted that afternoon, waving for help, they would have been saved. The fact is, they *were* sighted. A fisherman on the shore had noticed their frantic actions and notified the North Carolina highway patrol, which passed the word on to the Coast Guard. But for some unexplained reason, no general alarm was turned in until the following day. Then the Coast Guard, Civil Air Patrol, and volunteers began an all-out search. But an all-out search in an ocean like the Atlantic often depends on luck, and Sessoms and Boone had run plumb out of luck. At the end of four days, finding no sign whatsoever of the *Nail Keg*, the search was abandoned. Presumably, the men had been given up as lost.

As the little boat drifted further out into the ocean late that Saturday afternoon, the two men tried to plot strategy. Sessoms took off his shirt and hung it to a piece of board for a distress signal. Within minutes, though, it blew away. By this time Sessoms was feeling very low.

"Take another look at that land, Eddie," he said bitterly, "we might not see it again."

Boone tried to reassure his friend. "That's no way to talk, Wilson. I don't reckon there's much use of worrying. Somebody is bound to come along and pick us up."

Eddie Boone's carefree and optimistic outlook changed drastically during the evening as the small boat pulled farther and farther away from the shore. With the boat heaving up and down, taking the buffets of the high, cruel waves, Boone began to feel sick. Wilson Sessoms held his friend's head over the side of the boat while he vomited.

"It's those beans coming up on you," Sessoms said. The two had eaten the first can of beans that night, figuring they were sure to be rescued by the next day. "I ain't never been seasick before," Boone said. "Just don't seem right that beans should make me sick."

"You wait awhile till the water calms down," said Ses-

soms. "Then you'll be raring to get at those beans. You'll see."

Boone managed a weak smile, but said nothing.

When his spasms ceased, he and Sessoms lay down in the back of the boat and went to sleep. It was cold and wet, and they did not have any blankets with them, or any other covering except the clothes they were wearing. They huddled in each other's arms, trying to feed off the warmth of each other's body.

They awoke with a start a short time later, when they felt water washing against their backs. They began to bail as fast as they could with a couple of old oil cans. This went on most of the night. They would sleep for moments, then a huge wave would hit the side of the boat and rouse them, and they would have to start bailing.

"Can you see anything, Wilson?" Boone kept asking. "Any boats, any land, any sign of life?"

"All I can see," Sessoms told him, "is a big light, turning 'round and 'round, but it's growing dimmer. We must be moving away from it, unless I'm seeing it in my head."

"That's great," Boone said with disgust, "just great." He lay back in the boat and managed to fall asleep. Sessoms crawled up beside him and slept too. Both men were now too tired to care whether or not the boat foundered.

The next morning was Sunday; it was like no other Sunday either man had ever spent in his life. The water had grown calm and the sky was clear. The sun was out and beat down mercilessly through a clear blue, passionless sky. They opened the second can of beans and the last bottle of soda. Eddie couldn't keep the beans down. He started vomiting blood.

"Oh, I wish I could eat; I could eat anything," he groaned, "I'm so hungry. Give me some more of those beans, Wilson."

But when Sessoms would spoon the beans into Boone's mouth, the older man would simply get sicker, and Sessoms would have to hold his head over the side of the boat again.

Sessoms spent most of that Sunday, the day of rest, nursing Boone and bailing out the boat. When Boone was quiet, the two men would kneel down with their heads resting on the side of the boat and pray out loud for minutes at a time. Sometimes they would lie down on the bottom of the wet, rancid boat and talk. Boone, sick as he was, tried to command the situation.

"Don't drink any of that salt water, Wilson," he cautioned the younger man. "If you drink that salt water, it'll kill you."

"Don't worry, I won't drink any of it," Sessoms said.

But after the soda was gone, both men used the salt water to wet their lips and their tongues. Later that afternoon, the sun moved in behind black clouds, and it began to rain. Sessoms pried off the motor top and inverted it like a bowl, to catch the raindrops. He picked up enough fresh water for Boone; he held the sick man's head back and let the water trickle down his throat.

Sunday night, as the utter hopelessness of their position began to get the best of them and they lay like drowned rats in the bottom of the boat, their spirits were suddenly uplifted. Sessoms spotted the lights from a boat. It looked like a large boat. It couldn't be far away, Sessoms told himself; it mustn't be. He thought the lights seemed to be coming closer. There was one can of gasoline in the boat, which the two men had saved for just such a moment. Sessoms poured it over the stern. The lights seemed to be bearing down straight at the two castaways as Sessoms fished for a match to light the gasoline. He finally found a pack of matches in his jacket pocket, but the matches were wet. In desperation he struck each match in succession. He got not so much as a spark from any of them. The matches would not light.

They hollered and waved frantically, Sessoms leading the cheers because he was the stronger of the two. But the ship wandered past the small boat in the dark, fathomless night, totally unaware of the two wretched men, who drifted just beyond the range of their lights.

Eddie Boone, who by now was desperately ill, managed a shrug. "Don't worry, Wilson, there'll be more ships. Maybe the next one will see us."

Sessoms wanted to cheer up his friend, but he could not bring himself to be optimistic. "I sure hope you're right, Eddie," he said, fighting to hold back the tears that were choking him. He lay down in the boat, crying noiselessly into his hands.

On Monday morning, Sessoms opened the last can of pork and beans. The beans smelled so good to him that he felt like turning the can upside down and sucking them into his mouth. But he managed to restrain himself, eating only half the can. He tried also to feed Eddie some of the beans, but the older man was too sick to eat. That whole day he vomited blood endlessly. He was so weak that Sessoms had to lift him so that he could get his head over the gunnel.

By this time the blood, which left a dark red streak atop the murky water, had attracted company. A school of sharks was following the *Nail Keg*. Sessoms was not sure just how many there were, but there were a lot of them. Whenever they swam too close to the boat, Sessoms would wave his arms and holler. The sharks would dart away and fin through the water in patient circles around the boat. He laughed to himself. They're in no hurry, he thought. Those babies got all the time in the world.

By Monday afternoon the situation had grown worse. Both men's mouths were dried up, and their lips were cracked and peeling. Sessoms still was not too weak, just hungry and thirsty. But Eddie Boone was delirious, talking incoherently like a wild man.

"Just let me inhale some salt water," he would cry, and lunge for the side. Sessoms had all he could do to hold him in the boat. "I got to inhale some of that water, friend, I just got to, else my insides will dry up. Just let me breathe it, just let me breathe it. You're my friend. Please let me inhale some of that water."

Sessoms could do nothing, nor say anything. He simply had to sit there and watch Boone torture himself.

Once or twice that afternoon, Sessoms spotted airplanes circling in the distance, and a couple of times he thought he could make out the outline of a ship on the horizon. But the planes and the ships never did come near the *Nail Keg*.

The third can of beans lasted Sessoms all day. During that long, long Monday, he picked at the beans, two at a time. Once in a while he would try to get a spoonful into Boone, but each time Boone would get sicker. Sessoms wondered how a man could vomit so much blood and still live.

Whenever Boone was asleep, or quiet at least, he bailed. And as he bailed, he prayed.

"Lord, what else can I do? Please give me strength to help Eddie, and please, God, send someone to help us back to land before it's too late."

Monday night, Eddie got worse. Feverish and completely out of his head, he began to talk wildly: "Mom, Mom, where are you? Where are you? I'm gonna jump off this heap and swim to land. They're waiting for me. I don't like to keep them waiting. I got to swim for it. I got to. . . ." Then his mumblings would get incoherent, until Sessoms could only make out a word here or there.

He had to watch Eddie all the time, now, for fear he would jump out of the boat. Fighting with Eddie was doing Sessoms no good either. He could feel his own strength slipping away from him and wondered how much longer he could last.

Eddie's delirium, combined with the presence of the sharks, made that a night of terror for Sessoms. The sharks had now become so bold that they were banging against the side of the boat. *Knock. Knock. Knock.* Who's there? Wilson felt he must be losing his mind; the sharks seemed to be playing a game with him. Their knocking was so furious, he thought the boat would break apart, but he was too weak to chase the sharks off.

Tuesday was a hideous day for Sessoms. Eddie was completely out of his mind, and more and more sharks were gathering around the boat. Sessoms could see the menacing fins on all sides of him. He tried not to look by lying back in the boat, face down, but curiosity and apprehension got the best of him, and he kept bobbing his head up to see if the sharks were still there. They were.

He slept a little bit that day and night, but at about 4:00 A.M., he awoke with a shudder. Something was wrong, but he wasn't sure what it was. He felt for his companion's arm; it was cold and stiff. He went cold all over. Eddie Boone had passed away sometime in the night.

After the death of Boone, Sessoms lost track of time. He kept Eddie in the boat for the next two days and nights, sleeping in his dead friend's arms and trying to draw warmth from a body that was no longer warm. Every once in a while he would do a little bailing, but mostly he would just lie there, in his dead friend's arms, trying to sleep. Once during the night he imagined he heard people talking and music playing, but when he got up to look he could see nothing.

At the end of the second night after Eddie's death, the body began to take on grotesque aspects. There were big sores on Boone's hand, and the ends of his fingers were rotting away. The sun had burned hard blisters on his head, and his hair was coming out in big patches. Then there was the smell—the odor of decaying flesh made Sessoms deathly sick. It got so bad, finally, that on the third night after Eddie's death, Sessoms made what he later described as the hardest decision of his life. He decided to throw the body overboard.

It took him ten minutes to lift Boone over the back end of the boat. He slipped the stiff, inert form gently into the water and prayed long and hard. He didn't look back at the body as it settled into the sea, but he could hear the sharks—it was not a peaceful grave. Sessoms fell back in the boat completely exhausted and went to sleep.

After burying Eddie, Sessoms slept most of the time.

When he was not sleeping, he was either sobbing or praying. He had immense difficulty controlling his emotions.

He could never sleep for any long periods of time, because the water kept seeping into the boat. When the water hit his back, which by now was full of sores, Sessoms would wake up and begin to bail. The sores were ugly and painful, but Sessoms was too weak to feel much pain.

He lost all sense of time and all sense of life around him. He did not know whether the sun was out, whether it was raining, or whether he was cold or hot.

On the afternoon of the twelfth day of his uncompromising ordeal at sea, Sessoms, weaker in body than ever, but still resolute in spirit, continued to believe in his ultimate deliverance. It was this fundamental hope—nothing else—that was keeping him alive.

That afternoon a strange noise awakened Sessoms. It sounded like motors. He was so weak, he could hardly move, but he somehow managed to pull his head over the side. There, in the distance, he saw the most wonderful sight he had ever seen in his life. A huge ship loomed in the water. It is almost close enough to touch, he thought, and he put out his arms and tried to embrace the ship, but the ship was not that close.

Sessoms was so happy, he didn't know what to do. He tried to wave and shout, but his voice came out as a weak croak, and he was too weak to stand up. All he could do was to lie in the boat with his head poked up, exposed to view.

Then he noticed that the ship was moving away from him. "Oh, God!" he cried aloud. "They haven't seen me."

As if in answer to that final desperate entreaty, the ship began to turn around and bear toward him. Sessoms knew then that he was saved.

It seemed like an eternity to him before the ship eased alongside his little boat. A lifeboat was dispatched to the *Nail Keg*, and her crewmen picked Sessoms up as if he were a fragile doll and lifted him carefully into the lifeboat. Five minutes after his rescue, the *Nail Keg*, battered and

beaten by the waves and sharks, broke into a hundred pieces and sank to the bottom.

The ship that picked up Sessoms was the *Hess Petrel*, a tanker bound for New York. It had sighted the *Nail Keg* 125 miles off the Georgia coast. The little homemade fishing boat had drifted approximately 125 miles east and 265 miles south of the point from which Sessoms and Eddie Boone had begun their weekend fishing trip.

Sessoms said his thanks to God as he was lifted up the ship's ladder. When they got him aboard the tanker, they wanted to know how he had gotten out there and who he was. Sessoms showed them his waterlogged billfold and told them what had happened and how Eddie had died. Amazingly, Sessoms was able to walk to a cabin, with a couple of sailors on either side, helping him.

"Can we get you anything now?" one of the sailors asked him.

"Yes, you can. I'd like a cigarette and a glass of water." The water was the best thing Sessoms had ever tasted; the first drop of water, in fact, that he had tasted in nine days. Then they gave him some warm soup; and that was the first food he had tasted since finishing the last can of beans. Then he took a bath and lay down in the cabin between clean sheets and warm blankets and went to sleep.

That night at midnight, Sessoms was transferred on a stretcher to a Coast Guard cutter and taken to a hospital in Southport. At the hospital the doctors marveled at his condition. Although he had lost forty pounds and suffered from salt water sores and ulcers about the body and feet, Sessoms had survived the ordeal with no apparent lasting effect.



Death on the Mountain

Two young men set out to conquer Mont Blanc, but the mountain conquered them instead, and lured eight others into a battle for life on its slopes.

CLAIR HUFFAKER

The decision to flirt with death on the mountain was arrived at so lightly, so much with a shrug of the shoulders, that it is perhaps not accurate to call it a "decision" at all. It was just an idea they thought of that seemed at the moment to hold the promise of a lot of fun. Jean Vincendon and Francois Henry wanted to celebrate Christmas on the summit of Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in Europe.

On the morning of December 22, the two young men had an early breakfast with several friends at the Café National, where they were staying in Chamonix, a snow-covered resort town far up in the French Alps. Vincendon, a twenty-three-year-old physics student from Paris, was particularly happy about the proposed adventure. A top track man at school, he had fallen in love with mountain climbing in 1951, when he had made his first few simple ascents in the Alps. After that, he worked summers as a guide, and had gone through the severe courses given by the French National School of Alpinists. Henry, a blond, blue-eyed Belgian with wide shoulders and a more sober disposition than Vincendon, was a year younger than his partner. He was unusually powerful. Often, when his classes in geology were finished at the University of Brussels, he would load a knapsack with bricks and lug it through the fields around his home to build up his endurance. Both Vincendon and Henry hoped to be chosen to go with the

next French expedition to the Himalayas. They had known each other for four years and had climbed together whenever possible.

As Vincendon joked with the half-dozen people at the breakfast table and ate a last brioche with butter, an old Chamonix guide came into the Café National for his morning coffee. Thoughtfully stirring four lumps of sugar into the black coffee, the older man said, "You are still going up the mountain?"

"On Christmas," Vincendon told him, "we will sit on the top of Europe and drink a toast to the world below."

The guide sipped his coffee. "Weather reports are bad."

"Weathermen!" Vincendon grinned. "It is a splendid morning. There isn't a cloud in the sky."

"Go ahead if you want to, then. And good luck. But if you get in trouble, you can't expect the men of Chamonix to risk their lives trying to help you."

A skier at the table glanced out of the window at Mont Blanc's peak glistening high above them in the morning sun. "Probably," he said half in fun, "Christmas would be much pleasanter here in front of the fireplace."

Vincendon's fiancée, a pretty girl with dark eyes, said, "I wish you would both give it up. The weather reports sound bad."

Henry glanced at his watch. "There's nothing to worry about," he said. "We're equipped for anything. We'd better get going, Jean."

The first leg of the climb was easy. The two climbers and their friends rode in the cable car basket up from Chamonix to L'Aiguille du Midi, a low peak on the side of the massive Mont Blanc. As the others started back down on the cable, Vincendon and Henry waved cheerfully, then turned away and started up the vast, tilted fields of white toward the distant summit.

But the dominating character of the drama that had just begun was the mountain itself. Mont Blanc has a savage split personality. During the summer, it is an affable giant whose sides slope gently down into France on the

west and across the border into Italy on the east. Soft breezes play lazy games of hide-and-seek among the rocky ridges and chasms that lend character to the mountain's generally smooth face. By choosing the easier routes, almost anyone can climb to the top with no more equipment than a reasonably strong pair of legs. Each summer thousands of people, including elderly women and young children, "conquer" the good-natured titan's 15,781-foot peak. As winter sets in, however, the smiling face of the mountain slowly turns to a snarl of rage. Furious winds shriek over its frozen sides. Blizzards, as ferocious as antarctic storms, slash and pound at the summit, bringing hurricane winds of over one hundred miles an hour and temperatures of forty below zero. Monstrous drifts of snow and ice clog the passes and cover the slopes, waiting in uneasy balance for a sharp sound or a heavy footstep to send them crashing down in thunderous avalanches.

Despite the danger, numerous climbers attack the slopes, both from the French and Italian sides, during the winter. Only a few days before Vincendon and Henry started up, a party had made it to the top and back, due primarily to lucky breaks in the weather. The attitude of all Chamonix, though, was accurately expressed by the guide who had warned the two young men against the venture. If climbers were foolhardy enough to risk their lives, that was their business. But they could not expect men with families and homes to risk their lives to save them, if they blundered into trouble. The people of Chamonix remembered well how a superb climber, René Payout, had died in 1950, trying to bring help to an airplane that had crashed on Mont Maudit, next to Mont Blanc. They did not want another such tragedy.

All these things, then, were considered, but not considered seriously, by the two young men. In fur-lined boots and warm climbing clothes, they started cheerfully up toward their goal shining brightly above them in the blue sky—the rounded, distant summit of Mont Blanc. Vincendon and Henry found the going rougher than they had antici-

pated. Furthermore, in their enthusiasm, they made a mistake that mountaineers should never make. They took a couple of side trips, just for the hell of it, onto ridges and needles of the mountain that were not necessary in the direct assault on the peak, wasting time and, even more important, energy. When, on the twenty-fourth of December, they saw that bad weather was closing in on the summit, they were still far from their goal. And, intelligently, they started back toward Chamonix.

But a malevolent combination of circumstances and fate was working against them. Later that day, when they were well on their way to the bottom, they ran into two Italian climbers who had started up the mountain. The four men joined forces temporarily and spent the icy-cold Christmas Eve together in one of the refuge huts spotted here and there on the mountain. When the two younger men learned that one of the Italians was Walter Bonatti, they were tremendously impressed. Bonatti was an almost legendary Alpinist. A powerhouse of a man, he was a leader in the 1954 expedition to the Himalayas, in which K2, the second highest mountain in the world, was conquered. They spent a pleasant night in the hut, although conversation was limited. One does not—cannot—talk too much in such cold, rarefied air. Perhaps because of pride, the young men didn't mention that they had already been battling the mountain for three days unsuccessfully. One of them did say, however, that they had seen the beginnings of a storm near the summit and had turned back that day. But the next morning, Christmas Day, they felt strong and confident, and started back toward the top with the two Italian mountaineers. At midday, with the sun shining in a clear sky, the two parties of climbers separated. Bonatti and his partner, Gheser, intended to go up one of the meanest routes on Mont Blanc, by the Escalade de la Poire, between the Two Sentinels. Vincendon and Henry, realizing their limitations, were going to try the easier route along the Brenva Ridge. At Moore Col, wishing each other a Merry Christmas once more, the two groups went their separate ways. That night,

by coincidence, found Bonatti and Gheser camped about one hundred yards directly above Vincendon and Henry. "How you doing?" Bonatti called down. After a moment Vincendon's voice floated up the steep wall separating them. "Swell! Little tired. Some rest will help." From time to time during the night, they called back and forth. And that night, the mountain started to flex its muscles. The temperature of a thermometer Bonatti carried in his shirt pocket, *under* his heavy outer clothes, read twenty below zero.

Beginning early in the morning of the twenty-sixth, a blizzard of polar dimensions struck Mont Blanc. Bonatti tied his and Gheser's climbing ropes together and hauled the boys up. By the time the four climbers were together, fantastic, frigid winds were roaring across the mountain with the noise of speeding express trains. Immense waves of cutting, blinding snow slammed and tore at them. It was almost impossible to see one's own feet or hands held before the face. Bonatti believed that the French side of Mont Blanc was getting the brunt of the storm, so he decided the only way to safety was over the top of the peak and down the far side to Italy. Whether or not they actually stood on the pinnacle of Mont Blanc was unimportant, for now it was a matter of living or dying. Roped together, the four men started up in the general direction of the summit, hoping to spend the night in the Vallot refuge near the top and start down into Italy the following day. Gheser could no longer feel his feet. They were beginning to freeze.

After fighting six hours through a frozen, howling hell, the men decided they could make better time without four on a rope. They broke up into two parties once more. Vincendon and Henry stopped briefly to eat some nuts and dried fruits, and Bonatti and Gheser pushed on toward Vallot. The Italians made it to Vallot and spent the night in the small cabin. The next day, in snow so deep they had to pull their feet out with their hands at each step, and with Gheser frozen half to death, they started down the

Italian slope. The temperature that night, *inside* the hut at Vallot, had been thirty below zero.

And somewhere in the icebound nightmare of screaming winds outside were the two boys who had wanted to spend Christmas Eve on the summit of Mont Blanc.

The storm cleared briefly on the twenty-seventh. At Chamonix the worried, and angry, villagers watched the mountain slopes anxiously for a sign of the two young men. Vincendon and Henry had last been seen two nights before. Then, through a 60-power telescope at the observation tower on L'Aiguille du Midi, Marcel Simond spotted two human figures struggling through deep drifts of snow near a sheer precipice not far from the peak of Mont Blanc. One of the figures was upright; the other was on his hands and knees. Both were having trouble moving at all, and they seemed to have lost all equipment but the clothes they were wearing.

Now that the emergency they had feared was a reality, the villagers stopped muttering and cursing about climbers who insist on tackling Mont Blanc in the winter. Vincendon and Henry needed help. That was all there was to it. The decision to try to rescue the two young men from the mountain was not made by any one person or one group. It was simply understood automatically by everyone in Chamonix, and the town became strangely quiet as the police, expert mountaineers and guides, and the French Air Force base at Le Fayet were notified.

As the parents of the two boys hurried to Chamonix, a tall, strong-featured man, Commandant Le Gall, took charge of the rescue operations. The fight to save the lives of the two helpless young men became a battle between man, armed with every weapon of modern science, and nature.

Setting up headquarters at Chamonix in an atmosphere of restrained tension and anxiety, Le Gall was in constant telephone communication with both the air force base and the observatory on L'Aiguille du Midi, which was the only point from which the boys could be seen. A famous French mountaineer, Lionel Terray, arrived and began to organize

a party of climbers to attempt to reach them. If any man could get to them by land, Terray, who had been with Herzog at the conquest of Annapurna, could do it.

In the meantime, the first attempt at an air rescue was underway. A small plane, braving the treacherous currents of air around the mountain, flew close to Vincendon and Henry, who had collapsed on a large snow cornice, or shoulder. The cornice already had cracked away from the mountain slightly, and it looked as though a snap of the fingers would send the climbers and tons of snow and ice tumbling down a sheer drop of more than one thousand feet. Supplies were dropped not far from the men, but they did not have the strength to get to them. As the twenty-seventh day of December came to a close, vicious weather closed in on the mountain again; a storm set in that would go on sporadically during the entire rescue operation.

For three days, blizzards swirled mercilessly across the mountain. At L'Aiguille du Midi, an occasional rift in clouds, fog, and storm allowed Simond to catch a brief glimpse of the boys through the telescope. They were still alive. Somehow, they had made it to the plateau beyond the perilous cornice, but they apparently were too weak to reach the blankets, food, and supplies that had been dropped.

As soon as the fiendish weather showed any sign of abating, Terray, against the advice of nearly every climber in Chamonix, started up the mountain with a party of five expert mountaineers. The odds against Terray's returning alive were so great that no company would insure any man in the group. A simple pass, usually climbed easily in two hours, took forty grueling hours as they inched upward toward the students.

On New Year's Day, the weather cleared enough for the French Air Force to send a helicopter—a Sikorsky S-58—to try a landing near the stranded climbers. Air force officers Blanc and Santini were at the controls, and two experienced guides, Bonnet and Germain, went along to direct them to the Grand Plateau and to supervise the rescue if a landing

were possible. At noon the helicopter whirled slowly over the tremendous cliff topped by L'Aiguille du Gouter and moved cautiously toward the Grand Plateau under the peak of Mont Blanc. At the edge of the plateau, they saw the two boys.

With painstaking care, Santini inched the helicopter down toward the great, slanting field of snow about one hundred yards from them. "We're going to get them all right," Bonnet said optimistically. But twenty feet above the plateau, the great, sweeping rotors caused a violent tornado in the light snow below. The aircraft was suddenly enveloped in a small but blinding swirl of snow. At that precise moment, a furious wind roared over the plateau. Santini, his eyes filled with stinging particles of snow, fought the controls desperately. But an instant later, with its rotors churning wildly into a deep bank of snow, the 'copter was slammed down on its side. And now there were six men trapped on the mountain.

The four occupants of the plane were badly shaken up, but otherwise unhurt. When they had recovered from the shock, they fought their way across the plateau toward the students. Even with the sun shining and the wind temporarily lulled, the thermometer stood at thirty below zero. Vincendon and Henry were alive, but they were literally frozen stiff. Their faces under their parka hoods were black with frostbite. They could see, hear, think, and speak, but they could not move. Both of them had frozen arms and legs. Vincendon, the more lucid of the two, cried out, "I am dying." For a moment, Henry believed he was in the hospital at Chamonix. When he realized this was not so, his stiff, rigid lips moved awkwardly: "What a trick my mind played! I thought we were all right . . . in the hospital below!" Squinting through eyelids almost frozen shut, Vincendon said, "Without Francois, I would have been dead four days."

Another Sikorsky now whirled overhead, but the men below waved it away frantically. By radio, Le Gall warned them not to land on the plateau. The pilot set his 'copter

down more than half a mile away, on the broad Dome du Gouter, and four more mountaineers piled out. While two of them headed for the cabin at Vallot, the other two fought their way across the plateau to the point of the double disaster. Suddenly, a blasting wind roared out of nowhere and began pounding the good helicopter. The aircraft rocked dangerously as the icy gale battered and shook it, and the pilot was forced to take off to avoid being blown off the mountain. Seconds later, black storm clouds hurtled over the face of Mont Blanc. And now there were ten men trapped on the mountain.

Terray, not too far below with his fearless climbers, waved as the helicopter droned overhead. The pilot, briefly cutting his engine so he could shout to Terray, yelled, "*Catastrophe! Ils sont tombés!*" (Catastrophe! They've fallen!") Then he cut his engine back in and flew away. And Terray, not knowing anything about the downed helicopter, naturally assumed the pilot meant that the two students had fallen to their deaths. With this news, and seeing that bad weather was coming again, he did the only possible thing. He turned his men around, and they went back down the murderous route toward Chamonix.

On the Grand Plateau above, the four guides with Vincendon and Henry and the two pilots now faced a terrible choice. The army officers, banged up in the crash more than they had realized at first, were partially crippled. Also, neither of them was dressed for the agonizing cold on the mountain or had any climbing experience. It was a good half-mile or more to the refuge at Vallot. Night would be coming soon. The storm was building. In short, the four mountaineers could conceivably get two men to the shack across the plateau. But if they tried to get the four helpless men to the safety of the cabin, all eight of them might die in the attempt.

After everything that had been risked for them, Vincendon and Henry had to be left behind. There was no other way. Dragging the two boys one hundred yards to the overturned 'copter took nearly two long, killing hours. There

they made the two young men as comfortable as possible, wrapping them in blankets and sleeping bags inside the helicopter. Before shutting the door of the cabin, Bonnet said, "Don't give up hope." Vincendon and Henry, who were now little more than two living statues, could not speak. Vincendon managed to nod his head to show he understood.

Facing the explosive winds that bombarded the plateau between them and Vallot, the guides formed two teams. Bonnet and Germain roped Santini between them. The two other mountaineers, Chappaz and Munster, took Blanc. The dark gray, snowy twilight deepened into black night as the six men struggled blindly over the plateau toward the safety of Vallot. The wind was like a wild beast that mauled them and tore furiously at their clothes with icy claws and fangs. Bent double to keep from being blasted back across the plateau, they plodded slowly through the deep snow, one exhausting step at a time, with nothing but the mountaineers' sixth sense of direction to guide them toward Vallot instead of a freezing death.

After three dreadful hours, they were on a particularly steep flank of the Grand Plateau, when Blanc suddenly shot through a thin crust formed over a chasm. As he fell blindly into space, Chappaz and Munster instinctively dug in the best they could, gritting their teeth while they waited for the crushing jolt of his weight to hit the end of the rope. An instant later, the rope around their waists ripped deep into their bodies, and both guides were almost pulled down into the bottomless black pit with the army officer. As they skidded toward the brink, Bonnet and Germain rushed to help them. Blanc, his fall arrested, dangled in the dark void. He was banged mercilessly against invisible rocks and ice by the giant winds on the mountain, and the life line sawed like steel blades under his armpits. Twice it seemed that all three men on the rope would go down, but, after forty minutes of pure torture for everyone, Blanc was finally hauled back up.

For nearly three more awful hours, the six men fought

blindly on through the night and the tempest. Half of the time the mountaineers were forced to almost carry Santini and Blanc, both of whom, toward the last, could hardly move. And then they saw the lights of the refuge before them, and the other two mountaineers, Romans and Novel, rushed out to help them to safety. Inside the hut, Novel built up the fire in the iron stove, while Romans, who was equipped with a radio, transmitted the news of what had happened to those waiting anxiously below. Le Gall, and the others who were sweating it out, thanked God silently that at least none of the rescuers had been killed.

To the eight men now in the cabin, simply being able to sit and rest and breathe air into their agonized lungs was a wonderful experience. "God," Santini muttered hoarsely, "it is good to be out of that wind." But all of them realized that the relatively comfortable cabin could be their tomb. No one could approach them in such weather. It had taken them six hours to move half a mile over a plateau that was fairly level in most places. Even with the fire going, and the combined body heat of eight strong men, the temperature in the cabin was fifteen below zero. Normally, food is left in such refuge cabins, and Vallot was no exception. There was plenty of food, but it was frozen so solidly that teeth would crack before it would. The men had a couple of candy bars, and they found a few bottles of conserves that were edible. The conserves had been left at Vallot by scientists who were trying to develop foods that would not freeze, for use by polar expeditions. But the candy bars and conserves would provide eight men with perhaps two bites of food a day for two days. And the fuel on hand for the fire wouldn't last more than a day or two.

The eight men in Vallot greeted the New Year in sober, thoughtful silence, as the hellish wind outside blasted, trumpeted, and screamed its own hideous and noisy celebration.

The next morning, the blizzard showed no sign of letting up. At Chamonix, talking to the men on the radio, Le Gall tried to encourage them, even though he himself was suffer-

ing the tortures of damnation. Their lives were his responsibility. "Maybe we can get you out tomorrow," he told them. "The weather reports say the storm will lift soon."

The weather reports showed clearly that there was no indication at all of the storm clearing.

"We hope so," the radio crackled in return. "Santini is not well. And we're afraid Blanc is close to death. His injuries have sapped his strength. He may freeze to death, if help does not come soon."

All that day the storm continued, while the eight trapped men waited. Even now, they planned to try to rescue the two students, if the blizzard would let up. All that night they waited. They had given Blanc most of the conserves to build his strength up. The next day there was still no change in the weather. And all that night it roared as though it would never stop.

On the morning of the third of January, the guides at Vallot were exhausted, almost without hope. Most of them had eaten only a spoonful or two of conserves—or nothing—for nearly three days. Then suddenly the wind died down, and the sun broke through in a clear sky. Such freakish weather allowed Le Gall no time to hesitate. He ordered helicopters to take off from the air base at Le Fayet immediately. Every person in Chamonix, including the families of Vincendon and Henry, were praying for the eight rescuers stranded above.

At nine o'clock in the morning, a small French helicopter, one of the new, easily maneuverable Alouettes, whirled gracefully over the Dome du Gouter and landed on skis near the cabin at Vallot. Pilots Boulet and Petit waited, their eyes anxiously scanning the skies for storm warnings, while the men in Vallot streamed out of the shack toward them. Santini was the first man to be put aboard. "We don't dare put Blanc aboard yet!" Bonnet shouted above the noise of the engine. "We'll see how the take-off goes first. We're afraid a few bumps might finish him!" With a full load of men, the Alouette took off smoothly and swooped gently away toward the valley below. Almost im-

mediately, a second 'copter landed. Blanc was put in the plane with two others, and the pilot sped down to make an emergency landing on a snow-covered field behind the hospital at Chamonix. A third landing was made at Vallot, as bad weather began to close in once more, and the last of the rescuers were rescued.

Le Gall, his face deeply lined with worry and concern, listened gravely as a doctor reported on the condition of the men who had been miraculously saved: "Blanc is in a bad way. His right hand will have to be amputated, and his ears perhaps. Several toes. His face is frozen—we'll do what we can. He's lucky to be alive. Santini just missed freezing. He'll have to stay in the hospital, but he'll come out all right. The guides are all in fair shape. They were dressed more warmly. But another twenty-four hours up there . . . I don't know . . . We might have found them all dead."

With the eight men in good hands, Commandant Le Gall and a pilot took off in one of the French Alouettes. Even though the weather was becoming rapidly worse, they flew over the Grand Plateau, and Le Gall studied the crashed Sikorsky carefully. "Can you land anywhere near it?" he asked the pilot. The pilot shook his head slowly, saying nothing. Winds began to buffet the small aircraft brutally, and Le Gall said, "Storm coming again. Let's go back to Chamonix." On the way back down, one last thought came to the commandant. "Could you hold the Alouette steady enough for me to lower a ladder and carry the two boys up one at a time?" The pilot shook his head again. "No aviator could. These winds are too much."

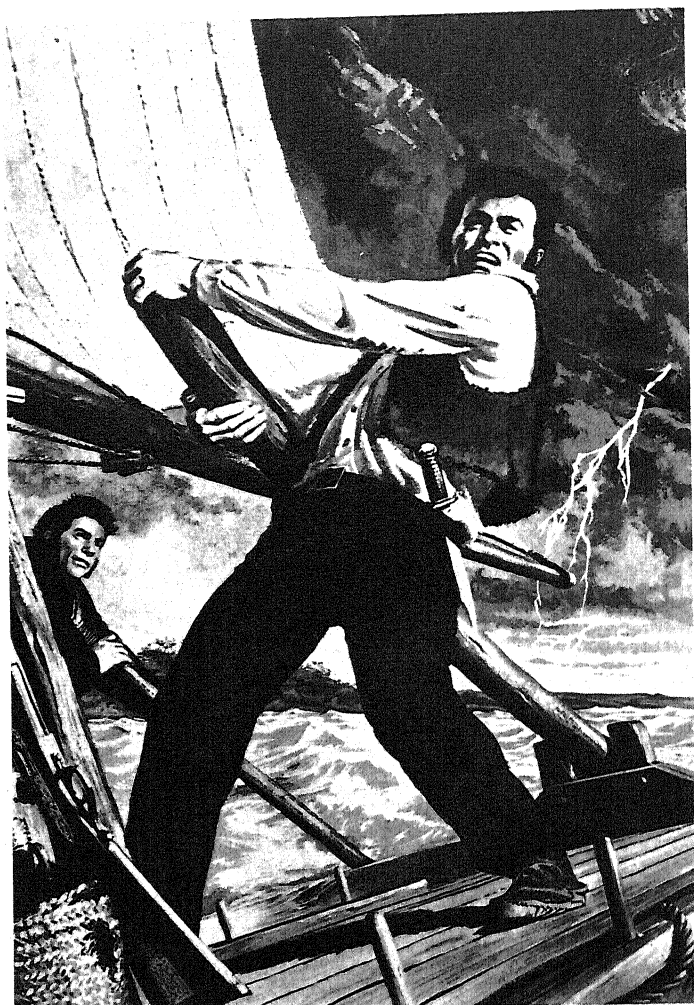
At his headquarters in Chamonix, Le Gall made a momentous announcement in a voice tight with emotion. "I've decided," he told the people there, "to stop our rescue operations. I will not be responsible for any more men risking their lives."

Even the families of Vincendon and Henry could not disagree with the decision. "Too many people have almost been killed already," Vincendon's father murmured. "The boys are either already dead or in a coma." He did not add

what was obvious to everyone in Chamonix. Even if the boys were rescued, frozen as badly as they were, the inevitable amputations would be too horrible to contemplate. It was amazing that the two young men had survived as long as they had in their nightmare world of ice and wind.

It was not until later that news came from Italy that Bonatti and Gheser had been with the two students and had been stranded in a fairly similar situation on the Italian side of the mountain. The two older men had been rescued by a climbing party, although Gheser was near death. Bonatti, one of the world's best climbers, walked down the mountain under his own steam.

Four men had challenged the mountain. Two were dead. And the mountain silently awaited the next challengers.



Mike Fink

He could outdrink, outfight, and outbrag any man on the Mississippi, and the tales of his might were so incredible that they almost made a myth out of the man.

JACK PEARL

The men gathered around the fire looked up as the boy came through the gate, the big rifle slung in the crook of his arm. He was only sixteen, but he looked a good deal older. Although he was short, the girth of his chest and the breadth of his shoulders made even the huskiest of the backwoodsmen seem almost frail by contrast. His hair, as shiny and black as a crow's feathers, grew long down his neck, curled over his ears, and hung low across his forehead. As he reached up a big hand to push it back out of his eyes, the muscles in his back rippled and knotted under the buckskin shirt, spreading an open seam along his backbone and exposing a patch of bare skin. Every movement he made revealed additional strains in the fabric at some point of stress—knees, hips, shoulders, and elbows—and gave the impression that at any second, pants and shirt would burst apart, leaving him completely naked.

His face was homely but pleasant, and when he smiled, his saw-tooth grin slashed from ear to ear, melting a little of the ice in his pale blue eyes.

"Hello, Mike," he was greeted as he approached the fire. "Gonna shoot with us, boy?"

Before he answered, Mike Fink shot a glance at a hand-lettered sign tacked up on a post: "David Neal offers a First-rate Beef, worth Eleven Dollars, to be shot for at his Farm at Twenty-Five cents a Shot, next Sunday."

"It's Sunday, ain't it?" he said simply. He reached in his pocket as a tall, heavy-set man with a slate and a piece of chalk came up to him. "Mark me down for five chances, Dave." He dropped a handful of coins into the man's hand. "One dollar and twenty-five cents, kee-rect?" He watched the other man's face sharply.

David Neal whistled as he counted the money. "You talk big, lad."

"I shoot bigger, Dave, an' I aim to take that whole beef home with me, I kin tell you. I'll be obliged iffen you leave it in one piece for easy cartin' away."

As was the custom at frontier shooting matches, the beef was divided into "five quarters": The best shot got the hide and tallow; second best took his pick of the hind-quarters; third best got the remaining hind-quarter; fourth best the pick of the forequarters; and the fifth got the last quarter.

The men squatting and standing around the fire laughed. "Sure you kin heft that there cannon, sonny?" one of them joked. "It's bigger'n you are."

"Not quite," Mike grinned. When he placed the long rifle, stock down, in front of him, the tip of the barrel just reached his nose. He propped the gun against a nearby tree and picked up a board from a pile of lumber off to one side. Squatting by the fire, he let the flames lick up one side of the board until it was charred and black with smoke. Other men were cleaning their pieces and melting lead over the flames to mold their bullets. When his board was thoroughly blackened, Mike handed it to one of the judges who fastened to it a piece of paper with a diamond cut out in the center, and carefully etched two vivid lines in the charred wood with the point of his knife, joining the opposite corners of the diamond, so that they crossed in the dead center of the cut-out. The judge then stacked the board on a neat pile of targets by his side.

After a while, David Neal announced, "All the shots is taken, boys. Let's get started on winnin' that beef."

The men spread out in a file a short distance behind a

log that marked the firing line, while the judges carried the targets about sixty yards down the meadow to a huge oak tree. David Neal called the first name on his list: "Hank Willoughby!" A lanky farmer stepped up to the log as the judges pegged a target board to the trunk of the oak tree. Willoughby emptied powder from his horn into his charger, shook it into the muzzle of the gun, took a rifle ball out of his pocket, spit on it, polished it on his shirt, and rammed it home down the barrel. He took a deep breath, took careful aim, and pulled the trigger. There was a sharp report and the acrid odor of black powder filled the air. The target quivered on its peg, and one corner of the board disintegrated in flying splinters.

"Didn't even eat paper, Hank," Dave Neal grinned. Next man, step lively! We got a lotta shootin' to do."

One by one, the contestants filed up to the log and took their turns, firing one, two, three, or more times, depending upon how many shots they had paid for. Nearly everyone did better than Hank Willoughby. Quite a few hit inside the diamond. Finally, young Mike Fink stepped up to the firing line. Down at the other end of the field, Dave Neal nudged a half-dozen boards with his toe and cupped his hands to his mouth. "All these here fellers hit the black diamond, sonny! Still think you can win beef in this match?"

Mike grinned. "Tolerable good shootin', all right. It'll take a good gun and a better man to whup you boys. But me and old Bang-All, that's just what we are." He caressed the stock of his long rifle.

"Snotty pup," an old grizzled woodsman grumbled.

Mike dropped a ball into his cupped hand, shook just enough powder out of his horn to hide the glint of the metal, and winked. "My eye's sharp as a sarpin's tooth today, granpa." When he had loaded, he hefted the cumbersome weapon to his shoulder lightly and fired, it seemed, without even taking aim. His thick, squat body absorbed the thunderous recoil without a quiver. The judges converged on the target, conferred a moment, then looked back to the firing line.

"Bull's eye!" one of them called. "Right smack where the lines meet."

The men in back of Mike stirred. "Nice shootin', lad."

"Just a chanct shot."

"Let's see you do it agin, boy."

Mike turned to the last speaker. "A quart says I will, Sam."

"Yur on!" the man roared. Turning to the others, he said angrily, "Somebody's gotta take the impudence out of this calf."

The judges shifted the target paper on the board and scratched two more criss-cross lines in the diamond. "Fire away!" Mike drew a bead and fired quickly. Before the smoke had cleared, the cry went up from the judges. "Another bull's-eye!"

"The hell it is!" The man who had made the bet went charging down to the oak tree to inspect the target for himself. A few minutes later, he was back grinning sheepishly. "The quart's yours, Mike."

Mike smiled and faced the crowd, blowing a last wisp of smoke from the end of his barrel. "I got three shots comin'. Any man say I cain't drive the cross again?"

"Taken," a voice in the back of the group shouted.

"Fine," Mike said cheerfully. "Your whisky's as good as anyone's, Si. We got a powerful thirst, me and Bang-All." The men stood about quietly as he squeezed off the next shot. The judges shook their heads unbelievably as they checked the target. One of them fingered the hole at the intersection of the two lines, as if to make sure his eyes weren't playing tricks on him.

"He drove the cross, all right."

The faces of the other marksmen were dark with disappointment. Not only was this cocky boy taking all their whisky and prizes, but he was a positive menace to a man's pride. They were all veterans of countless Indian battles; most of them had manned portholes at Fort Pitt, and many had had the distinction of being Army Rangers.

"You aim to quit while you're winnin', boy, or are you

game to give us a chanct to win back that whisky?" Dave Neal asked roughly.

Mike laughed. "Hell, man, that there miserly two quarts ain't more'n a swallow. To make it worthwhile, I'll need at least a gallon."

"Move the paper!" Dave yelled to the judges. "I'll bet you a quart you can't drive the cross a fourth time, and another quart on your next shot."

"Leave the paper alone," Mike cautioned the judges. "Stand aside and I'll wrap up this match quick like, so we can git down to the serious affair of wetting our whistles." Mike shot, and then, as the judges started for the target, he waved them back. "Let 'er be!" He reloaded quickly and pumped another ball at the target. His last shot was a signal for the whole mob to flock down the field and crowd around the oak tree. Mike followed them at a leisurely pace. The men were all grins as he came up to them.

"Looks like you overreached yourself this time, lad," Dave Neal said, not bothering to hide his satisfaction. "You missed good this time. Didn't eat paper; didn't even eat wood."

Mike lowered his head and squinted gravely at the target. "I been doin' all the work, so's I figured it was about time you gentlemen did somethin'. If you'll look real sharp, you'll see I put 'em one on top o' the other, so's you'd have to dig 'em out."

The other men had a good laugh at that. "Just like a youngster," someone said. "Won't admit he missed."

Mike was unflustered. "If you'll just dig for the lead in that bull's-eye," he said, "you'll find three bullets ridin' front to back like little gals in a daisy chain. If that ain't so, you can peg the targets on my butt in the next match."

A judge unsheathed his knife and started to probe in the bull's-eye. One, two, and finally three pieces of lead dropped into his palm. "I'll be damned," he said, staring dumbly at the bullets. "Three shots cuttin' a four-point center!"

Dave Neal, his face red, stuck out his hand to Mike.

"Man and boy, I ain't never seen such shootin'. You won fair'n square, lad. The 'hull beef and four quarts of whisky. The only thing left is the lead in the tree."

"Thanks, Dave." Suddenly, the good humor drained out of Mike's face. Deliberately, he propped his rifle against a tree and turned so he faced the men. He clenched his big, knotted fists and braced them on his hips. "The drinks is on me, boys, but I aim to get somethin' off my chest first. The next man as calls me 'sonny,' 'lad,' 'youngster,' or the like is a-goin' to have to go at it with me. I can outshoot, outfight, outdrink, and out-anythin' else any man in Pittsburgh. Now if any man wants to try me at rough-an'-tumble . . .?"

There were no takers. It was plain that Mike was a man grown.

Mike Fink was born of Scotch-Irish parents in a little log hut on the Monongahela River within the shadow of old Fort Pitt, whose splintered and weatherbeaten stockade still bore the scars of years of Indian attacks. In 1770 Pittsburgh was the farthest boundary of civilization on the frontier and a wild and lawless town in spite of the saw-mills, distilleries, brick and lime kilns, taverns, hotels, and other business and private dwellings that made it a prosperous and sprawling community. Life wasn't valued very highly there, and a night watch was still posted at the old fort to guard against the ever-present danger of a surprise attack by the Indians.

Even at an early age, it was obvious that Mike was no ordinary boy. He could throw a tomahawk like an Indian, and he could outfight and outwrestle any boy his weight who cared to try him. At a time when the Monongahela country was the scene of numerous murderous raids by the Indians, and when white men who ventured into Indian territory were frequently ambushed and scalped or burned at the stake, Mike thought nothing of disappearing into the woods on the west bank of the river for days at a time to hunt and trap. His father gave him his first rifle when he was twelve, and, despite the fact that the gun was bigger than he was, in a few weeks he had developed an uncanny accuracy

with it. At thirteen, he was assigned a post at the fort, and he accompanied the Rangers on their expeditions into Indian territory. At Fort Pitt, he met and mingled with the great heroes of the day, famous Indian fighters like Sam Brady, Lewis Wetzel, Captain Jack, and all the rest—an honor equivalent to a modern youth rubbing shoulders with Stan Musial, Jackie Robinson, and Ted Williams. Impressed by the boy's natural ability and prowess, these veterans taught him all the finer points of shooting, scalping, and handling a knife. Mike was a good student, and he practiced tirelessly with his rifle. Soon he was competing against men in the local shooting matches, and before he was twenty, he was recognized as the best shot in Pittsburgh. In fact, his skill with the rifle became so celebrated that he was finally barred from competition. As a courtesy, though, he was automatically awarded the "first quarter"—the hide and tallow—in every match that was held. In recognition of the honor, Mike would often sell the prize and treat all around to whisky. At seventeen, he was accepted into the Rangers, and during the next few years, he won an enviable reputation as an Indian fighter. But as the settlers poured into the West in increasing numbers, and it became evident that civilization was taming Pittsburgh, he became restless.

Mike had first suspected he had muddy-river water in his veins when, as a boy, he would lie awake in the darkness, bewitched by the riverboat horns wailing their nostalgic lament up and down the valley through the long summer nights. He was always filled with a sad longing when he stood on the banks of the river and watched the boats drifting lazily in the sunshine and heard the happy sounds of the boatmen as they lounged on deck, passing a jug around and strumming guitars while the current carried them along.

When the Congress of the Confederation passed the Northwest Ordinance, which made it legal to settle the rich lands in what is now Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan, thousands of seacoast dwellers pulled up stakes, packed up their families and possessions, and headed

west. Some who preferred a warmer climate fixed their sights on Kentucky or Tennessee. But regardless of which way they were heading, the easiest and best route to the frontier was the water trail.

A man could pack his family and all his possessions aboard a riverboat and then sit back while the current took them into the promised lands. The Ohio snaked into the new territory for one thousand miles or more, and whenever a man took the notion, he could strike inland on one of the many tributaries that branched off the main artery. Or, if the South was his plum, he could ride to the end of the line—two thousand miles from Pittsburgh to St. Louis on the Ohio and the Mississippi.

Those in the vanguard of the movement arrived in Pittsburgh and built their own boats, which accounted for the high incidence of sinkings and drownings that gave the river routes an alarming reputation. Gutted wreckage and bloated bodies—human and animal—were a common sight on the Ohio and Mississippi. Almost immediately, the word spread to the bays and harbors of the eastern seaboard that boatbuilders, carpenters, and marine craftsmen could get rich in Pittsburgh, and the stampede was on. That solved the problem, partially, but even with a good boat, the sailor still had to contend with the sandbars, rocks, islands, fallen trees, and other treacherous hazards waiting to rip the bottom out of a barge or overturn a raft. Indians and gangs of outlaws preyed on unsuspecting river travelers too, ambushing them from hidden inlets or taking pot-shots at them from the wooded shores. To meet the challenge of precarious inland water travel, there soon sprang up a new type of rugged, fighting sailor—the riverboatman.

The men who ran the riverboats were the most colorful of all the frontiersmen. They were men who were too big, too strong, too exuberant, and too ornery to conform to the rules of civilization or to stay long in any one place; army deserters, law-breakers, incorrigibles, who had been run out of their home towns for one reason or another, and in general, troublemakers, whose rebellious and aggressive

natures made them unacceptable to society. They were scornful of danger, they liked to fight and drink, and they flourished on hardships that would have killed ordinary men. The river was a haven for them; it offered a way of life equal to their stormy natures and a constant challenge to their vigor.

The hair at the base of Mike Fink's neck always bristled whenever these burly roughnecks marched through the streets in their gaudy red shirts, blue jackets, and rakish leather hats; all muscle and cheek, elbowing everyone out of their path, and singing lustily:

Some row up, but we row down, All the way to Shawnee Town!

And in the taverns Mike listened with wide-eyed envy to their tales of New Orleans—where people spoke French and wore their Sunday clothes every day—and Natchez-under-the-Hill, the only town on earth made up exclusively of taverns, gambling casinos, and bawdy houses. One night Mike stood on the fringe of a bunch of keelboatmen at the bar listening to one burly giant describing the charms of the women of Natchez. “. . . they got the purtiest legs and the shortest petticoats, and they don't wear nothin' much under 'em neither!”

“Damn!” Mike exclaimed impulsively. “They sure must be somethin’!”

The boatmen all turned and stared at him. He was a good six inches shorter than any of them. “Well,” said the man who had been speaking. “I don't recollect you was invited to this party, sonny.”

Mike flushed. “I was just listenin’. I'm gonna be a boatman someday.”

The boatmen all looked at one another and laughed. One fellow, well over six feet and half as wide, winked at his mates. “Well, you're in luck, my lad. It happens we're lookin' for another hand to ship out on our keel.”

“On a keel!” Mike was awed. The keelboats were the pride of the helterskelter fleet that sailed the great rivers. “You think I could be a keelboatman right off?”

"Well, I don't know." The boatman scratched his head. "You're a bit of a runt. Don't know iffen you could pass the test."

"What test?"

"You got to lick a keelboatman to get a job on a keelboat."

"Is that all?" Mike sounded relieved. "I was scared it might be somethin' hard."

This time it was the boatman's turn to flush. He pointed to a large red feather perched jauntily in the rim of his hat. "You see this, stranger? Know what it means?"

"Cain't say I do," Mike said curiously.

The boatman drew himself up straight so that he towered over Mike, his square jaw jutting menacingly. "I'm the champion rough-and-tumble fighter of this here crew! That's what it means! Think you could lick me, sonny?"

"Only one way to find out," Mike said mildly, gesturing toward the doorway.

There was a murmur from the other keelboatmen. "Talks big for a little man," one of them remarked, sizing up Mike's broad chest and thick shoulders. "Still, he's built like a molasses barrel."

"He's gonna roll like one too, when I start in on him," the boatman with the red feather said acidly. He turned to his comrades. "This shouldn't take long, boys . . . Bartender, set up a bottle so's it's ready when I come back in. A quart'll do. I don't aim to work up much of a thirst with this bantam." He strode away from the bar and through the swinging doors with Mike at his heels.

One of the keelboatmen called the bartender, "Say, what's the young feller's name?"

"Mike Fink," the bartender said. "Why?"

"Just wanted to make sure somebody knows it, so we can put it on his headstone."

About fifteen minutes later, Mike came in alone. His left eye was closed and his right eye was swollen; his nose was bloody and a front tooth was missing when he grinned. Stuck in the brim of his hat was a bent and frayed red

feather. "Hey! Hey!" he pounded on the bar with his skinned knuckles. "Set up a round of drinks for me and my new shipmates!"

The keelboatmen exchanged shocked looks. They gathered around him, eyeing the red feather skeptically. "You lick old Jake rough-and-tumble?" one of them demanded. Mike took a long swig from the bottle that had been set up for his opponent and wiped his mouth with a torn and bloodstained sleeve. "That ain't no beauty nap he's takin' out there in the gutter," he said grimly.

Next morning, Mike got his first look at the boat that was to be his home for the next six months. She was a slim, trim craft about fifty-five feet long and barely eight feet wide, with a box-like cabin that covered most of the deck and left only a narrow footpath running around the sides. Fixed to the stern was "the sweep," an awkward-looking rudder that swept out behind her like a huge oar. There was a single mast rising out of the middle of the cabin and a crude sail that would remain furled for most of the long voyage downstream. They got under way just as the first rays of the sun slanted through the fog that hung low over the river.

"Stand to your poles and shove off!" the captain shouted. On the boatman's horn, the steersman blew a long blast that was hurled back from the other boats in the river. Four oarsmen in the prow set a rhythmic cadence as the men on the poles shoved her into the current. When they were in midstream, the boatmen stowed their poles and climbed up on top of the cabin where they stretched out comfortably. A little later they were joined by the oarsmen. The only man left on duty was the steersman. Mike felt a surge of excitement as the sleek keelboat probed her way through the boats that crowded the river and pulled out ahead of them. The discordant symphony of crowing roosters, bleating calves, mooing cows, barking dogs, and singing men was music to his ears. A quartet of his shipmates began to harmonize lustily while a fifth strummed a banjo:

*Hard upon the left oar!
She moves too slow
All the way to Shawneetown
Go! Go! Go!*

They passed clumsy houseboats carrying menageries that would have done justice to Noah's ark, and massive barges propelled by fifty or sixty oars that swept across the water like giant bugs. There was a great shapeless flatboat which looked like a floating box. It was called a "broad-horn" because of the thirty-foot oar that projected horn-like on each side to help maneuver it in the swirling current. A fifty-foot oar sticking far out in back served as a rudder. Mike reflected that it would take a powerful man to handle it. The clumsy craft was piled high with a mountain of furniture—beds, mattresses, kitchen utensils, and other household goods. And there were other boats that reminded Mike of nothing so much as piles of driftwood.

All these craft had a look of impermanence, which was not accidental. They were strictly one-trippers. At their destination, whatever it might be, they would be broken up and sold for lumber. Mike puffed up his chest and smacked his feet on the sturdy decks of the keelboat, proud to be aboard this pride of the river his first trip out. A keelboat was a *real* boat, built on a keel with ribbing and solid, calked plank. She shot downstream like greased lightning and could navigate in tricky shallows and bends where other boats could never go. And even though her draught was small, she could carry a record fifty tons of freight in her hold. But, best of all, the keelboat was the one boat on the river that could go upstream. Only the most hardy riverboatmen were deemed fit to serve on the keelboats.

Mike looked around happily at his shipmates sprawled on the spacious cabin roof. They were scattered in groups, playing poker with dog-eared decks of cards, fishing off the stern, or napping with their slouch hats across their faces to screen out the early morning sun. A giant Negro came up with a fiddle that looked like a toy in his big hands and

scraped out a jig, while a couple of other burly hands danced around him like clumsy bears.

Grinning happily to himself, Mike went back to the stern and struck up a conversation with the steersman. "I aim to larn all I can about runnin' this here keel," he said. The steersman, a leathery-faced veteran of ten years on the river, winked at him. "Keep your eyes and ears open, lad, and fix everythin' in this little book in your mind, and you'll be a first-rate keeler come next trip." He handed a tattered, greasy, much-fingered little volume to Mike. Mike read the title: THE NAVIGATOR, CONTAINING INSTRUCTIONS FOR NAVIGATING THE MONONGAHELA, ALLEGHENY, OHIO, AND MISSISSIPPI RIVERS, WITH AN AMPLE ACCOUNT OF THESE MUCH ADMIRIED WATERS, FROM THE HEAD OF THE FORMER TO THE MOUTH OF THE LATTER, AND A CONCISE DESCRIPTION OF THEIR TOWNS, VILLAGES, HARBORS, SETTLEMENTS, AND WITH MAPS OF THE OHIO AND MISSISSIPPI.

Mike whistled. "Hell! I can't even remember the name. I'll do better watchin' you."

The steersman laughed. "Hamilton's Island ahead," he said. He fitted the boat expertly between two sandbars and brought her in close to the west shore of the island. Near the foot of the island, he threaded a narrow passage between a peninsula and a group of saw-tooth rocks. Mike wiped his perspiring forehead. "Whoopee! Never thought a greased hog could've squeaked through there."

Time passed quickly as they cruised down the broad, smooth Ohio. On either side, the deserted, heavily wooded banks reached up high into the cloudless blue sky. The noon sun set the water alive with a dazzling silver fire, and now the steersman had to handle the oar with one hand, while he shielded his eyes with the other. Mike gasped as the skeleton of a dead tree loomed up out of nowhere in front of them, reaching out for the boat with wet, twisted arms. The steersman threw the rudder hard left, and they just managed to ease by.

For the next half-hour, the steersman had his hands full avoiding a wide variety of fallen trees, broken limbs, driftwood, and other snags that the keelboat overtook in its swift passage downriver. A flock of brightly-colored birds, circling like rainbows overhead, trailed after the boat, scolding and chattering.

Soon after sunset, the boatmen made ready to tie up for supper at one of the hundreds of small islands that dotted the Ohio. Night came on quickly in the gorge of the river, as the late afternoon shadows of the bluffs and the forest dyed the water black as ink. When the boat was grounded and tied to a tree, the boatmen built fires and roasted chunks of pork on sticks and potatoes in the hot coals. Mike had to wash down every bite of the dry, crusty fare with a swig of sour-mash whisky. "It's a good thing this lightnin' ain't petered out with water," he muttered. "Takes some-thin' strong to cut through all that charcoal in my pipes." Later they sat around the fires drinking and smoking and telling rough stories. About nine o'clock, a full blue moon climbed up over the treetops lighting up the Ohio with a soft silver glow, and the captain decided it would be safe to push off again. The riverboatmen liked to travel at night because, with the exception of the steersman, all hands could sleep away the equivalent of a full day's traveling time.

Curled up in a blanket on the fore part of the cabin roof, Mike lay awake half the night, staring up at the glittering stars and listening to the water slapping against the hull. Once he rolled over on his stomach and stared at the oily water breaking on the prow, but a couple of close brushes with ominous black shapes floating past made him so jittery that he turned on his back again. Let the steersman worry about 'em, he said to himself, and iffen we hit anythin', I'll know it soon enough. Minutes later, the gentle rocking motion of the boat put him to sleep.

As they approached the mouth of the Ohio, the current moved faster. The steersman showed Mike the famous outlaw stronghold, Cave-in-Rock, and the Three Sisters Islands.

Mike was envious at the skill he displayed snaking the keelboat through the Grand Chain of Rocks. At last they left the high bluffs of the Ohio behind them and entered the chocolate waters of the Mississippi, where the flatlands stretched away on both banks with only an occasional rolling hill to break the monotony. Shifting sandbars, a faster current, whirlpools, and other hazards brought the boatmen face to face with disaster a hundred times a day on the Mississippi. It was no longer possible to travel at night.

About two weeks after they left the Ohio, the keel put in at Natchez, the wickedest town on the Mississippi. There was always a fleet of broadhorns, barges, keels, and rafts clustered beam to beam about its rickety, sagging docks. Aside from being famous for its brothels and its whisky, Natchez marked the end of the most rugged stretch of the river and was a welcome haven to the weary boatmen. Actually, Natchez was a two-faced town. High up on a bluff overlooking the river sat Natchez proper, as respectable a community as you could find anywhere in the country. About two hundred feet below it was Natchez-under-the-Hill. The two places were about as different as heaven and hell.

Mike and his crewmates swaggered ashore and headed into the first saloon they came to, shouldering their way through a crowd of bronzed, broad-shouldered boatmen, who were lined up ten-deep at the bar, swearing and laughing as they passed bottles of pale corn liquor from hand to hand. There were "hostesses" of all sizes and shapes, wearing plumed hats and gaudy spangled dresses. Full, round bosoms spilled out of low-cut necklines, and full hips wiggled in tight, short skirts. Mike was so fascinated by the high heels and silk stockings on the girls that he almost forgot his enormous thirst. The girls were kept busy, coyly pushing away the dozens of hands that reached out to touch them from every quarter. But they didn't push too hard. Like all shrewd merchants, they knew the value of advertising. A few free samples now might mean lots of eager

customers later in the evening. Dancing with the less inhibited boatmen, the hostesses allowed themselves to be held in a fashion that never would have passed muster in a less notorious atmosphere.

"Thunder and lightnin'!" Mike roared as he watched the dancers. "I never did no dancin' in my life, but I can sure do *that*!" He lunged toward a plump little redhead who was undulating her hips nearby and grabbed her by one arm. The girl squealed as Mike tugged at her, but to his surprise she seemed rooted to the spot. It didn't take him long to discover why. Another boatman had a firm grip on her other arm.

"Take your scabby, filthy paws off my woman!" the other boatman bellowed. "You slobberin', lousy son of a squaw!"

"Nobody calls Mike Fink's maw a squaw!" Mike said angrily. He pushed the girl aside and looked up into the ugliest face he had ever seen. For a moment the two men sized each other up; simultaneously they both noticed that each wore a red feather in his hat.

"Ho-ho!" the other boatman jeered. "You must hail from a lily-livered crew, stranger. My sister could take the feather from a runt like you!"

"Then she's a better man than her brother," Mike spat. "I hail from the fightin'est crew on the old Missasip, and we don't generally dirty our hands with scum like you, but in this case I'm willin' to make an exception!"

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" the boatman tugged angrily at the stiff black beard that covered his fat cheeks like porcupine quills and reared back like a big bull on its hind legs. "My maw was a grizzly b'ar, and my paw was a streak of lightnin', and the whole world shook with fear the day I was born. I kin swallow a keelboat whole without belchin' and even a flatboat iffen you butter its horns. I can lick anythin' human or unhuman on the face of this here earth, and I'll take you anyway you choose: gun, knife, tomahawk, or barehanded." He flapped his arms up and down like a fighting cock, beating out a challenge on his barrel-thick thighs.

Mike scratched his head while the other boatman kept jumping up and down, shaking the building like a small tornado. "I ain't prepared to swap brags with you, stranger, but if you ain't winded from all that spoutin' off, square off, and I'll show you a few things about rough-and-tumble, keelboat style."

Quick as a chipmunk for all his weight, the bearded boatman whipped a full bottle off the bar and smashed it down on Mike's head. The glass exploded in all directions, slicing a deep gash in Mike's forehead and sending blood and whisky spraying into his eyes. Moving in fast, the big man brought a big knee up into Mike's groin, and then, as Mike doubled over, he laced his hands in a double fist and chopped him on the back of the head. Blinded, the wind knocked out of him, and his head spinning, Mike instinctively started rolling the second he hit the floor. He felt a heavy foot brush the side of his head and took a glancing kick in the ribs. He lunged out desperately in the direction of his tormentor and caught hold of a foot. With all the strength he had, he twisted it and shoved it up and away from him. There was a crash as a heavy weight hit the floorboards. Mike's head was clearing, and he could see out of his right eye again. Blood from the cut on his head was still flowing into the other eye. He leaped to his feet and backed away, crouching like a cat, looking for his opponent. The crowd, which had formed a wide circle around them, was equally divided in its sentiments. The keelboatmen were cheering for Mike, and the broadhorn and flatboat crews were yelling for their champion.

The bearded boatman bounced to his feet and began stalking Mike. They circled each other like pit bulls, each looking for an opening. They both sprang forward at the same instant, whaling away with roundhouse blows, as if they were wielding sledgehammers. Mike spit out a mouthful of teeth. The other man squealed piglike as his nose collapsed in a red smear. Fists and faces were smeared with blood and the floor was slippery with it. Once the bearded boatman's legs went out from under him and he landed

flat on his back. Mike leaped in the air and came down with both knees in his rival's belly. There was the loud hiss of expelled air from the boatman's lungs, and for a moment he went limp. Mike's backers started a cheer that trailed off in a groan as the big man did a backward somersault and flipped Mike over his head. Both men staggered to their feet and met head-on, grasping each other in bear hugs. The crowd grew silent, sensing that this was the fateful moment. With their hands locked at each other's back, the two boatmen began to turn on the pressure, closing the vise tighter and tighter. Mike gasped for the weak trickle of air that felt like molten fire searing his lungs and windpipe. His head felt like a balloon that was getting bigger and bigger and soon must burst. He flexed his muscles and added a little more authority to his grip. His opponent's face was blue now, covered with beads of sweat, and his eyes were bloodshot and bulging. Mike could feel the great chest and back muscles fluttering ever so slightly now under the pressure of his arms. He knew that was the first sign; soon they would give way completely. He called on his last reserves of energy. In a last desperate effort, the bearded boatman began butting Mike's face with his head. Mike stopped that quickly by sinking his teeth into the man's ear. A few minutes later, it was all over. Mike could feel one of his foe's ribs snap, and then the bearded boatman collapsed, his breath rushing out in an agonized scream. Mike relaxed his grip and let him fall to the floor.

There were thunderous cheers, and the victor was raised on the shoulders of his boatmates and carried out through the doors for a parade down the main street. "Mike Fink!" the cry was picked up all over town. "Mike Fink, King of the Keelboatmen!"

Having demonstrated his superiority with his fists, Mike now proceeded to demonstrate his capacity for alcohol and women. "I don't intend to deny a single gal in town tonight," he boasted to his crew. "A pint of liquor to fire my boilers and a squirmin' wench to put the fire out; I can go on all night on that recipe."

Mike probably would have made good his boast if the French madam of the finest "house" in town hadn't gone down to the docks to plead personally with the captain of the keelboat. "Pleez, *monsieur*, I beg of you. Take theez Feenk fellow away. He ees ruining my business. My girls, they refuse the other men while he ees here. *Mon Dieu!*" That afternoon all the dance-hall girls in town lined up on the wharf and waved handkerchiefs and fancy pieces of lingerie as Mike's keelboat drifted downriver on its way to New Orleans.

Mike was deeply stirred by the lush tropical beauty of New Orleans, where the boats were lined up along the levees as far as he could see. The city was a kaleidoscope of color, exotic birds and flowers of violent hues, houses that were bright pastels of tile and stucco. Whisky, tar, fish, and human sweat blended with the heavy, sweet fragrance of the foliage to lull the mind and body like a narcotic. All during the first day in New Orleans, Mike took his ease on a bale of cotton in the market place, watching the strange and beautiful people pass by—rifraff in rags, aristocrats in lace, brown men, black men, yellow men, and white men dressed like no people Mike had ever seen before. They spoke Spanish and French and wore Sunday shoes, even though it was the middle of the week. But with it all, Mike Fink couldn't forget the exciting women of Natchez—at least not until a beautiful, almond-eyed wanton dressed in gold and lace and wearing silver slippers winked at him from her balcony.

Mike made so many trips down the Ohio and Mississippi that he lost count of them. Most of the trips were on keelboats, but occasionally he worked on flatboats. In fact, he was the first boatman to take a broadhorn through the falls of the Ohio River. One minute the big floating box was moving sluggishly through water as placid as glass; the next she shivered from stem to stern with a grinding of timbers and leaped forward like a frightened mare. A young greenhorn, who was on his first trip, went tumbling head over heels, and would have rolled overboard if Mike

hadn't caught him by the scruff of the neck. "Hold on, boy!" Mike shoved him against a hatch cover and then walked spraddle-legged across the lurching deck to the stern. They were plunging through a stretch of white water that boiled, churned, and spat foam all over the boat in a roaring fury. Black, snaggle-toothed rocks slashed at their sides like snapping dogs, and the shore was a blur of green and brown. The steersman, a husky six-footer, was fighting a losing battle with the rudder. With both arms wrapped around the handle of the big fifty-foot oar, he was slung back and forth across the deck like a mop on the end of a stick.

"Let go!" Mike shouted above the boom of the rapids as he staggered up to the stern. The steersman relinquished his hold gratefully and lay sprawled out on the wet boards gasping for breath. Mike kicked off his shoes and, with his bare feet planted wide apart, waited for the handle to sweep back to him. As the heavy oar slammed into his body, he clamped it tight against his side, grunting at the impact and skidding a few feet across the deck. Splinters burned in the soles of his feet, but he held fast and brought the rudder under control. The broadhorn steadied as she shot through the falls. Then, like a flat stone, she went skimming out across calm water once more. Mike relaxed his hold on the rudder and laughed.

"Hey!" he called up to the white-faced greenhorn who was still desperately clutching the hatch cover. "If you think that was somethin', wait 'til you latch onto one of them Natchez women!"

Gradually Mike Fink's reputation grew, and his name became a byword up and down the river. Historians tell us he could load a keelboat in record time all by himself, lift a keg of whisky with one hand, and lick any man on the river in any kind of a contest. No current could make him backwater, and even in winter freezes, when the ice piled up in mountains in front of his boats, Mike always got through. He could row, pole, and steer better than any boatman alive, and he knew the Monongahela, Ohio, and

Mississippi Rivers better than Zadok Cramer, who had written THE NAVIGATOR. Other boatmen liked and respected him, not only because of his strength, but also because his skill in every phase of boating was close to perfect. It was one of the consolations of a dangerous profession to be working a boat with Mike Fink. Mike worked his way up to captain very quickly and eventually acquired two keelboats of his own, "the prettiest craft to be found in these parts." He was a rough but popular captain who could back up his orders with his fists and drink all of his crew under the table. His companions fondly named him "Snapping Turtle" and "The Snag." He was a great talker, and he loved to tell funny stories. If anyone failed to laugh at them, Mike would promptly flatten the offender.

His love for practical jokes frequently got him in trouble with the law. Once while drifting down the Mississippi, he spied a flock of fat sheep grazing on the bank. "By God, I'd fancy sinkin' my teeth into some of that juicy mutton," Mike declared.

"Mebbe we could make a trade with the farmer," one of the boatmen suggested.

"Trade, hell!" another crewman snorted. "Iffen you tie 'er up for ten minutes, Cap'n Fink, I wager I'll fill those empty meat barrels quicker'n a sarpint can spit."

"Blast it, man!" Mike swore. "That 'id be plumb dishonest! Nosiree, Mike Fink does things fair and square . . . Take her into shore, steersman!"

While some of the crew made the mooring lines fast, Mike went below and opened a bladder of Scotch snuff that was in the cargo box. Stuffing his pockets with the fine tobacco, he went up on deck and picked several men to go ashore with him. They rounded up half a dozen of the sheep, and while the men held them on each side, Mike rubbed the snuff in the faces and up their nostrils. Then he sent one of his men up to a farmhouse further up the hillside to fetch the sheep's owner. Soon a portly white-haired gentleman came running down the grade, supporting

his huge belly with both hands. "What seems to be the trouble, Captain?" he gasped.

"Take a look at yur sheep, sir," Mike said gravely.

The six sheep Mike had treated with the snuff were jumping around the field like jack-rabbits, bleating and rubbing their noses in the grass.

"Tarnation!" the farmer exclaimed. "Have they gone mad?"

Mike stared at the man in amazement. "You ain't never heard of the black murrain?"

The sheep owner went white under his tan. "The black murrain!" His voice trailed off in tremulous whisper. "You don't mean . . ."

"That's it, all right," Mike assured him. "Down the river sheep are dyin' off like flies with the murrain. Must be movin' along this way."

The poor farmer pulled off his hat and wiped his head with a bandanna. His eyes were bright with horrified fascination as he watched his flock splitting up in chaos, as the "afflicted" sheep went streaking among them, snorting and rolling on the ground.

"Is there any cure for it, man?"

"None I know of," Mike said, chewing thoughtfully on a stalk of grass. "Won't be long 'fore your whole flock gets it too. Shame. They're a fine lot of sheep, and they must be worth a lot of money."

The farmer wrung his hands frantically. "Ain't there nothin' I can do?"

"Only one thing. You can pick out the ones who has murrain and shoot 'em. That way they cain't infect the others."

"That's a good idea," the farmer grasped at the suggestion. "But how would I know which ones had it for sure?"

"Takes experience," Mike admitted, a glint coming into his eyes.

"Cap'n, would you do it for me?"

"Well, I tell you, friend. I'd like to oblige you, but we're way behind schedule as it is. It would take several hours

'fore I could inspect every sheep properly, and by that time it'd be dark."

"I'll pay you to do it," the sheep owner implored. "Two gallons of the best brandy you ever tasted."

Mike pretended to think about it for a time; then he looked at his men, standing off to one side. "I know my boys are in a powerful hurry to get to Natchez, but I reckon they won't grudge me doin' you the favor so long as they got a jug to suck on."

"Thank you, Cap'n! Thank you!" The farmer laced his fingers across his round stomach with a sigh of relief.

"Jus' don't forgit," Mike cautioned him righteously. "Nex' time you hear your neighbors runnin' down us river-boatmen, you put in a good word for us."

"I will, I will, I will, Cap'n," the farmer assured him. "I'll go up and fetch down that brandy."

Under the grateful eyes of the farmer, Mike shot the six sheep which he had dosed with snuff—and a few more that were "coming down" with the black murrain—and tossed their bodies in the river. That night, under cover of darkness, the boatmen jumped overboard and retrieved the carcasses from the shallow water. For the rest of the voyage, the crew feasted on prime meat.

"Always do things on the fair and square," Mike lectured them solemnly.

After a while, the people of the river towns caught on to Mike and his pranks. In every town on the Ohio and Mississippi, complaints piled up in the sheriff's office, charging the King of the Keelboatmen with everything from mayhem to grand larceny. The complaints were usually tucked away and forgotten, for there weren't many lawmen who relished the idea of tangling with Mike Fink. But on one occasion, an old and treasured friend of Mike's, who happened to be a constable in Louisville, devised a shrewd plan to bring him to justice. Mike and a bunch of his friends had just tied up their yawl at the wharf, when the constable boarded the boat, wiping his eyes with a handkerchief and sniveling as if it was the end of the world. In

tragic tones, he told Mike that his family was starving to death, that he was heavily in debt, and that he was about to lose his house and all his possessions. His only hope, he said, was to collect the fat reward that was offered for bringing Mike to the courthouse to stand trial for the charges against him.

"They'll never convict you anyway, Mike," he blubbered. "So it wouldn't hurt you none to go with me."

Mike paced up and down the deck, frowning and cussing as he sifted it around in his mind. Finally, he said, "I'll go with you, Sam . . . But on one condition. Without a boat, I'm like a fish outta water. If you'll let me go on my yawl with my crew, you kin take me to the courthouse."

"On your yawl!" the constable said disbelievingly. "Why, the courthouse is in the center of town. Ain't no water nowheres near it!"

"Now, now, Sam," Mike patted his bent back. "Don't take on so. If you'll get yourself a wagon and a team of oxen, I'll have my boys load the yawl aboard her, and we'll sail right up to the courthouse."

Willing to do anything, no matter how crazy it seemed, to bring the elusive Fink up before a judge, the bewildered constable went off and hired the biggest wagon he could find. Mike and a dozen of his strongest boatmen lifted the little yawl out of the water, as if it were a piece of driftwood, and deposited it in the back of the wagon. Then they all climbed aboard and took their places as if they were on the running boards of a keelboat. Mike gave a good imitation of a boat horn and shouted, "Stand to your poles; make ready to shove off!"

The driver cracked his bull whip over the backs of the oxen, and the strange procession started up the hill, with the boatmen chanting as they helped the struggling oxen up the slippery grade by pushing some of the load with their poles. Half the townspeople fell in behind the wagon as it lumbered down the main street, laughing and shouting and cheering the boisterous boatmen. Standing at the prow of the yawl with his red feather in his hat, Mike bowed

to the right and to the left, acknowledging the applause. When they reached the courthouse, the boatmen piled out on the ground and followed their captain into the crowded courtroom and down the aisle to the judge's bench. It took the magistrate a good half-hour to read all the charges against Mike. When he was finished, he cleared his throat and looked over the top of his spectacles, "Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" Mike boomed, meeting the judge's eyes squarely, feet spread wide, his brawny brown arms folded defiantly across his massive chest.

The judge peered out across the court. "Any witnesses against Mike Fink?"

Mike's crew seized on this moment to draw their long, menacing sheath knives. Some of them began to clean their fingernails. Others blew on them thoughtfully and wiped them on their buckskins. A few picked at their teeth. Little spots of light danced all over the faces of the spectators as the shiny blades glittered in the sunlight pouring through the broad open window at the side of the courtroom. There was a restless mumbling and a shifting of feet. But no one stood up. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, the magistrate shrugged and banged his gavel down on his desk. "Case dismissed . . ."

"Hurray for Cap'n Fink!" the boatmen cheered. Hoisting Mike on their shoulders, they went charging down the aisle, bowling over everyone in their way.

"Man your posts!" Mike roared, as they scrambled up the sides of the wagon onto the yawl. He brought a fat pole whacking down on the backsides of the oxen. "Geel!" As they went rocking down the street at a good clip, Mike took out his handkerchief and waved it in the manner of a mincing maiden at the sea of stunned faces in front of the courthouse. "So nice to have seen you," he piped in a high falsetto. "We'll stop in again sometime."

Although Mike Fink was hated and feared by respectable folk up and down the river, their feeling toward him was nearer to the reverent antipathy one reserves for super-

natural demons than to loathing for a fellow human being. For who but a demon could drive a keelboat upstream through the powerful currents of the Mississippi?

On the river they still talk about the time Mike took a full cargo from New Orleans to Pittsburgh—two tons of dead weight for every man aboard! It was a superhuman task rivaling any ordeal of physical strength and endurance man has ever been called upon to perform.

In the shallows, the boatmen lined up at the head of the boat on the narrow catwalks that ran down both sides and planted their stout poles in the mud of the river bottom. Fitting their shoulders into the sockets on the ends of the poles, they commenced the long agonizing walk to the stern, driving the keelboat forward with the thrust of their powerful legs like horses on a treadmill. The veins in their throats stood out like twisted knots; bulging sinews burst through the seams of shirts and trousers, as the red-faced, grunting giants fought their way along the catwalk. They leaned into the poles at a forty-five-degree angle. As each man reached the stern, he lifted his pole and hurried forward to begin the exhausting march all over again. It was an agonizing ordeal that went on mile after mile, hour after hour, without let-up. The current had to be fought all the way up the river.

The poles, as thick as small trees, creaked and bent like bows. Sometimes one would snap in the middle with a loud crack, and a poleman would go tumbling into the river. Going downriver, the other boatmen would have crowed with delight at such a comical sight, but now it was no joke. They cursed as the keel, deprived of its balance, wavered, and threatened to slide off broadside to the current.

"Hold 'er steady!" Mike Fink would roar from his position at the head pole. The men would grit their teeth and dig in hard until she was stabilized again. It was the unwritten code of the river that if any man faltered, and the boat fell off and backwatered because of his lapse, he would be blacklisted for life by all the captains.

In the rapids, only one man at a time could shift his pole, for the least misjudgment in poling or steering would put the boat at the mercy of the rushing water, which could pound the sturdiest craft to splinters on the rocks.

At the end of their second straight day of poling, many of Mike's crewmen were so sore and tired when they tied up for the night that they didn't want to eat. But anyone who wrapped up in his blanket before the meal of half-baked pan bread and blackened meat was served got a stiff kick in the ribs from the captain. "You'll down your vittles iffen I have to jam 'em down your gullets with a pole!" Mike growled. He knew well that another day, just as grueling or worse than the one they had been through, was facing them, and that the men needed all the fuel they could get, if their bodies were to stand up to the punishment they had to take.

A good night's rest and a hardy breakfast boosted morale considerably, and when dawn brought a stiff southwest wind, the boatmen felt a lot better. This was more like it. Singing and laughing as they worked, they raised the sail and made the lines fast in rings in the deck. The canvas filled with a hollow *whoomp*, and the keelboat creaked and squawked as she shook her timbers and came alive. Wagging her heavy tail a few times, she plunged into the current, gradually picked up speed, and wallowed clumsily across the surface of the wind-rippled water while the men cheered. There wasn't too much activity aboard that day. The boatmen were content to sleep away the hours in the sun, resting up from the exhaustion of the previous days.

The wind held out until nightfall, but the following morning dawned still and hot. Mike looked out across the placid water and frowned. "Too deep for poles. I reckon we'll break our backs on the oars for a while." And break their backs they did. Mile after mile, the bare, broad backs of the oarsmen moved back and forth in monotonous cadence, their long blades flashing wetly in the sunlight, with the faultless rhythm of marching soldiers. There were stretches along the banks where the trees swept out over

the river, their lower branches drooping low above the water. In such places Mike had the steersman bring her in close, and all hands who weren't sweating over the oars lined up on the roof of the cabin for a "bushwacking" session—dragging the boat along by pulling at low-hanging limbs and foliage. When the current became too strong to make any headway by this method, Mike took a gang of two dozen men to one bank, carrying a heavy tarred line that was tied to the mast. Now a gigantic tug-of-war ensued as the men staggered up the rocky shoreline or through the water up to their knees, pulling the keelboat after them. If they reached a point where one bank became impassable, they had to "warp"—carry the line across in a small boat, or swim it across—and continue along on the opposite bank.

And so it went day after day, week after week, and month after month, the indomitable boatmen conquering the river inch by inch and foot by foot. On the last lap of the journey they got a favorable breeze and the sail was raised. Two days later the keelboat cruised into Pittsburgh in royal fashion. The bronzed boatmen were eager to get off the boat and into the taverns and brothels.

When Mike and his crew swaggered down the street with their red shirts and tight trousers bulging with muscle, the townspeople gave them a wide berth. But like the Pied Piper, Mike always had a swarm of youngsters tagging along at his heels. As calloused and brutal as he was with grown men, he could be gentle and understanding with women and children. Even after a long stretch on the river, when he was longing for the sight of a fancy woman and a sniff of good Monongahela rye, he would often sit down on the curb with a crowd of eager boys around him and spin a tall tale or two before he joined his mates.

Later on, he would storm into the nearest saloon, elbow his way to the bar, and pound on the counter, roaring, "The drinks are on Mike Fink, and I'll flatten anyone who refuses my hospitality!" As he polished off the first quart, he would tell jokes and stories to the other patrons. And if any man didn't appreciate them, it was to his advantage to slip out

of the room as unobtrusively as possible. With his pipes well oiled by a quart or two, Mike would climb on a table and let loose his famous brag:

"I'm a Salt River roarer! I'm a ring-tailed squealer! I'm a reg'lar screamer from the ol' Missassip'! Whoop! I'm the very infant that refused his milk before his eyes were open and called for a bottle of old rye! I love the women an' I'm chockful o' fight! I'm half wild horse and half cock-eyed alligator, and the rest o' me is crooked snags and red-hot snappin' turtle. I can hit like fourth-proof lightnin', an' every lick I make the woods lets in an acre of sunshine. I can outrun, outjump, outshoot, outbrag, outdrink, an' outfight, rough-an'-tumble, no holts barred, any man on both sides of the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans an' back ag'in to St. Louee. Come on, you flatters, you bargers, you milk-white mechanics, an' see how tough I am to chaw! I ain't had a fight for two days an' I'm spilin' for exercise. Cock-a-doodle-doo!" Then he'd bellow like a bull, jump into the air, and crack his heels together. It was strictly a formality, for few men were audacious or foolhardy enough to accept a challenge from the King of the Keelboatmen.

One day, after he had issued his challenge and had climbed down from the table, Mike caught sight of a fellow sitting in a far corner of the room, paying no attention whatsoever to his theatrics. The man, who wore the costume of a riverboatman, was a handsome youth with close-cropped blond hair and a serious, intelligent face. He was completely absorbed in a game of solitaire, and as he licked his thumb and riffled through a deck of greasy playing cards, he was sipping from a glass of milk. Mike was highly insulted.

"Who's that stranger over in the corner?" he demanded of the bartender.

"Can't say, Mike. Never saw him before."

Mike's neighbor nudged him with his elbow. "That's Jack Pierce. Works a flat boat outta here. I hear tell he licked Negro Jim his last time South."

"No!" A glass tumbler splintered in Mike's clenched fist.

He wiped the slivers of glass from his calloused hand onto his blue jacket. "I don't believe it!" One of the few boatmen on the river who had ever earned Mike's respect was Negro Jim, an ebony-colored giant who worked on the docks in New Orleans. Mike and Jim were staunch friends, and both had squelched numerous open and sly attempts to goad them into what all the boatmen felt would have been the battle of the century. It certainly wasn't timidity that prevented the match, for both Mike and Jim had, on occasion, waded singlehanded into whole gangs of rival boatmen and had taken some pretty savage beatings for their recklessness. It was simply that the two men genuinely liked one another and neither wished to tarnish the reputation of the other. "I jus' don't believe it," Mike repeated. "That pup never licked Jim. Flatters allus were liars. Git him over here."

"Hey, Jack!" the boatman yelled across the room. "Come on over here! Mike Fink wants to buy you a drink."

Mike glared sullenly at the young blond boatman as he made his way to the bar. "He's a big one, Mike," the man at Mike's elbow hissed. "You better watch out!" Mike's face turned purple. "For that milksop?" He grabbed a bottle off the bar and took a long swig from it, to take the edge off his fury. "They say he's got the hardest head in the world," the other man continued. "Once he traveled with a circus. Put on some kind of an act where he butted a goat to death."

Mike grunted as Jack Pierce stopped in front of him. "This here is Mike Fink, Jack," another boatman introduced them. "Ary a better boatman on the Missassip'." He grinned and kidded good-naturedly, "King, meet the crown prince. This young feller aims to fill your shoes some day, Mike." The joke infuriated Mike, especially since the "king" had to crane his neck like a small boy to look up into the "prince's" face. Pierce just smiled amiably, "Pleased to meetcha, Mike." He offered his hand. Mike gripped and clamped down on it as hard as he could. Pierce's smile never wavered, but the instant Mike relaxed his grip, he

began to put on the pressure himself. Pain went dancing up Mike's arm as if someone had whacked his funnybone with a sledge. He forced himself to smile. "Got a good grip, boy. A couple of more seasons on the river and a quart of likker a day, and you'll be in good shape." He pounded the bar. "What are you drinkin', lad?"

"Milk."

Mike swore. "Milk! Hell's bells! Now I know it's a lie! No man 'tween here and New Orleans could whup Negro Jim, much less a milksop!"

Jack Pierce reddened, but kept his voice even, "The man who can best answer that is Negro Jim hisself. Ask him about it next time you see 'im."

Mike pounded the counter so hard with his fists that glasses and bottles all along the bar rattled and shook. "I've heered all the impudence I'm gonna take from yuh, Jack Pierce. Will you fight me rough-an'-tumble?"

"I'd like to oblige yuh, Fink, but I promised my sick mother I wouldn't drink or fight in her last days on earth."

Mike began to howl and hop up and down like a madman. "I never did see such a lily-livered, snivelin', lyin' excuse for a man. You ain't fit to live with decent men, Jack Pierce. Iffen you ain't outta town by sunset, I'll chaw you into little pieces and stow 'em in my bait box for fish food."

The muscles in Jack Pierce's cheeks began to twitch. "I'll wrestle you though, Mike Fink," he said quietly.

Mike howled. "Hear that, folks?" He laughed at the circle of faces around them. "He'll rassle the old Snag. Well, that's better than no show at all. C'mon." He took Pierce by the arm and led him outside into the street. While the crowd poured out of the tavern and formed a ring around them, the two boatmen stripped to the waist. Both were magnificent physical specimens, with broad shoulders, heavy chests, thick arms sheathed in muscle, and skin tanned almost black from the sun. Mike was broader, and his heavy, knotted sinews gave him the appearance of a gnarled oak. Pierce had the long sleek

muscles of an athlete and looked lighter beside the older man, although he towered over him in height. Mike spit on his palms. "Ready lad?" Pierce nodded. The two men closed like great lumbering bears, grunting and straining with their legs spread wide apart, arms locked around each other.

Pierce tried to lift his squat opponent off the ground, but he might as well have tried to uproot a big oak. Mike laughed and broke the hold with a twist of his body and shoved him away. As Pierce staggered back, Mike stuck out his leg, seized him by the wrist, and tried to whip him across his knee. Pierce twisted out of the hold and made a dive for Mike's outstretched leg. Mike put a big hand in his face and straight-armed him. Pierce's head snapped back as if he had been kicked by a mule, and his nose began to bleed. Moving with lightning speed, Mike stepped in and grabbed him around the waist and lifted him clear off the ground. With a display of strength that made the crowd gasp, he straightened up and catapulted the husky six-footer back over his shoulder. But in the instant that he hung across Mike's shoulders, Pierce hooked Mike's chin in the crook of his elbow. Mike gagged and rocked back on his heels as the momentum of his foe's weight caught him in the neck. He staggered backward, frantically trying to regain his balance, but his feet got tangled, and with a final roar of anger he tumbled flat on his back with Pierce on top of him.

The spectators were ominously silent. It was the first time to anyone's knowledge that Mike Fink had ever been thrown. The fall had knocked the wind out of Mike, and by the time he sat up, Pierce was putting on his shirt. The expression in Mike's eyes as he got to his feet left no doubt that he had murder on his mind. As he moved toward Pierce, a bunch of his crewmen leaned forward and grabbed him—not out of any love for Jack Pierce, but merely to save their captain from meeting an untimely end on the gallows. Mike fought like a trapped wolverine, cursing, threatening, and begging his men to let him get at Pierce, but they

hung on stubbornly. "Damn you to hell, you flatter!" he screeched at Pierce, "You got to fight me now. Yur sly tricks won't save you in rough-an'-tumble. The Snag'll bite yur gizzard out in a fair fight!"

"I promised my mother I wouldn't fight, Mike Fink, and I won't. Mebbe some other time, but not today." Fortunately for the peace of the community, Jack Pierce went downriver on his flatboat that same afternoon.

For months afterward Mike Fink brooded over his humiliation at the hands of the young flatboatman. The first question he asked, whenever he tied up in a new town, was, "Is Jack Pierce around?" And as headshakes greeted him wherever he went, he became moodier and more dejected. And then one night Mike caught up with Jack Pierce in a smoke-filled saloon in St. Louis.

Mike knew he had found his man even before he saw him, for the story of his grudge was popular in every city and one-horse town the length of the river. No sooner had he pushed through the swinging doors than the laughing, singing, and shouting petered out like an old-fashioned phonograph record on a run-down victrola. A tinny piano gave out with a few last chords and stopped. Mike looked around the room and saw Pierce seated at a table at the far side of the saloon with four dance-hall girls. Hooking his fingers in his belt, he walked across the room as the crowd cleared a path in front of him. Pierce's face was expressionless as Mike stopped in front of him. Mike looked at the girls and at the bottles of whisky on the table.

"Looks like you broke your promise to mama, boy," Mike said sarcastically.

Pierce flushed. "My mother's dead. And I'll thank you to leave her name outta this."

Mike laughed softly. "And I'll thank you to get to your feet, milksop." He whipped Pierce across the face with the back of his hand. "Git up and fight like a man!"

The slap sounded like a pistol shot in the hushed saloon. Jack Pierce leaped to his feet, upsetting his chair and the table, with a clatter of bottles and glasses that sent the

girls scurrying for cover. The bartender vaulted the bar and came across the room waving a club in the air. "I'll brain you both if you start anything in my house!" he yelled. "Go on outside if you want to fight."

"That suits me," Mike said. "I don't want to mess up this place with your blood, flatter." The crowd was anxious to see this fight, and the two combatants were quickly swept out the door and into the street. Outside, the boatmen split into two factions, those who were backing the keelboatman and those who were backing the flatboatman. The betting was heavy on both sides. Mike and Pierce stripped to the waist and squared off in the middle of the dusty road. They sparred for a few seconds, and then Mike rushed in with both hands flying like the sails of a windmill. Pierce ducked in under his arms and speared him between the eyes with a hard right. A trickle of blood streamed down Mike's face, but he kept advancing on the weaving flatboatman. With his back to the crowd, Pierce stood his ground and shot two hooks into Mike's midsection. It was like hitting a stone wall. Mike caught the flatter with a roundhouse, right on the side of the head, that sent him staggering on the side, and before Pierce could recover, Mike was on top of him. He drove his knee into Pierce's groin, then picked him up bodily and dropped him flat on his back like a sack of meal. Mike pounced on the fallen man like a big cat and dug a knee into his stomach. Straddling Pierce's chest, he began to rake his face with chopping punches. Pierce's head bounced off the dirt like a punching bag. It looked like the end of the flatboatman right there, but as Mike tried to steady his head with one hand while he got set to deliver the "kill" with his powerful right, the flatter suddenly twisted around and caught Mike's thumb in his teeth. He bit hard, clear through to the bone. Mike doubled forward in agony. Quickly, Pierce brought up his hands and gouged Mike's eyes with his forefingers. With a howl Mike tore his thumb out of Pierce's mouth and went tumbling backward, off the flatboatman.

Mike bounced to his feet, fresh and springy as a new

ball, but Pierce was reeling dizzily. It was evident that the pile-driving punches he had absorbed had taken the best out of him and that he was at the mercy of the keelboatman's brute strength. Mike started to charge again, but then he stopped suddenly. "They tell me you butt goats, Jack Pierce! How about showin' the Snappin' Turtle how you dood it?" He bent forward and began to bleat like a goat, wagging his finger on each side of his head like a horn. "Here I come!" Something flickered in Pierce's glazed eyes. As Mike came charging down the road toward him with lowered head, churning up the dust, Pierce bent over and braced his hands on his knees with his head down. Their heads met with a loud crack that sounded "like maul upon timber." Pierce staggered back about five steps, but he stayed on his feet. Mike seemed to be frozen in the posture he had assumed at the moment of impact. His eyes were as lifeless as marbles. Finally, his knees trembled and his head drooped, and he collapsed in a heap on the ground, blood-streaked foam sputtering out from between his lips. Jack Pierce had barely enough strength to stagger to the side of the road. Then he too, collapsed, unconscious.

A few hours later, the two adversaries were back at opposite ends of the bar, shaky, bruised, and bloody, but still able to lift a glass with their friends. Down at Mike's end, the conversation and atmosphere were a little strained, a condition that was emphasized by the big celebration the victor's constituents were having. "Let's go someplace else," one of Mike's friends suggested at last.

"Not yet; there's still somethin' I gotta do first," Mike mumbled. With sudden decision he swung around and walked the length of the bar to where Jack Pierce was sitting. Certain that this was the signal for one of Mike Fink's famous rampages and a general free-for-all, most of the customers beat a hasty retreat to the door. Pierce's friends gathered in back of him, tight-lipped and grim, as he stood up to meet Fink. Face to face, it was hard to believe that poor Pierce had been the victor in their recent fight. His eyes were closed, his face was cut and swollen,

and his lips were puffed up like balloons. In contrast, Mike was comparatively unmarked except for a cut over his eye.

Then to the surprise of everyone present, Mike extended his hand to Pierce. "You whupped me fair-and-square, lad. Will you take my hand?"

Pierce sighed with relief. "I'll be proud to shake yur hand, Mike Fink, and count you among my friends. You make a better friend than you do an enemy, that's for certain."

The two men shook hands solemnly. Then Mike said, "To rightly seal our friendship, we oughtta shoot the cup together."

The flatboatmen shuffled their feet uneasily and began to whisper excitedly among themselves.

"Don't do it, Jack!"

"The Snag aims to even things up with a ball in your head."

Mike's eyes were hard and bright. "What do y'say, Jack Pierce?"

The flatboatman ran a hand through his blond hair. His face was pale. "I'll shoot the cup with you, Mike Fink."

The practice of shooting the cup, originated by Mike Fink, was one of the most famous rituals on the frontier, the strongest pledge of friendship two men could make. Each man, in turn, would place a tin cup filled up with whisky on his head; the other would withdraw a specified distance—thirty, forty, or fifty paces, as the case might be—draw a bead with his rifle, and shoot the cup off his friend's head. Considering that the participants were usually drunk, the targets none too steady, and the rifles far from true, it is hard to conceive of a more convincing demonstration of mutual "faith." Mike later added a refinement that made the show even more colorful. When the cup was comfortably settled in place, a third party would pour in more whisky until it was brimful. The object was to crease the slight bulge of liquid above the rim with the bullet and spill a few drops. Then both contestants would drain the cup in a toast.

Fink, Pierce, and an entourage of their fellow boatmen retired to the riverbank. Mike boarded his keel and ducked into the cabin. A few minutes later he was back with his rifle and a small covered bucket. As he was loading old Bang-All, one of the boatmen opened a bottle of whisky and began to fill a tin cup. Mike stalked over to him and snatched the cup away. He drained the liquor and pointed to the bucket.

"Fill 'er up with that."

The boatmen clustered around him as he took off the cover. "Milk!" the men chorused in a note of uncertainty. Some of them laughed, but Pierce's friends looked unhappy. "He's out to do you dirty, Jack," they warned him.

"I don't doubt it," a friend of Mike's whispered confidentially to a crony. "I know the Snag. He'll never rest 'til he evens matters up with Pierce."

Nevertheless, Pierce took his place bravely, the cup brimming with milk on top of his head, while Mike measured off fifty paces and took a position so that Pierce's head was silhouetted sharply against the big orange half-circle of the late afternoon sun that was sinking slowly into the river. Except for a lonesome crow cawing in a treetop, it was very still as Mike put the rifle to his shoulder and aimed. As old Bang-All spat fire, the milk splattered and trickled down the sides of the cup in a half-dozen places. Gingerly, Pierce lifted the cup from his head, a big grin spreading across his face. There was clapping and cheering as Mike went up to him, took the cup from his hand, and took a long swallow. "Brrr . . ." he grimaced distastefully. "You must be a strong man, Jack Pierce, to stomach that dose."

Pierce laughed as he reached for the cup and emptied it. "You're a good sport, Mike Fink."

"Now it's your turn, Jack." Mike offered him the rifle.

Pierce shook his head. "Mike, I may have a harder skull, but I'm not the man you are by a long shot. Iffen I was to take a shot at you, I'm afraid the keels would have to find a new king."

Mike sighed, "I'm afraid you've taken care of that already, lad. But iffen you're the man I know you are, you'll be givin' me another chance to go at it with you agin next time we meet."

Pierce grinned. "Not if I see you first."

Mike Fink and Jack Pierce were destined never to meet again. A month after their epic fight the hard-headed flat-boatman became involved in a butting match with a goat and had his brains knocked out. And so, once again, Mike Fink was the undisputed king of the river.

Very little is known of Mike Fink's love life, although at one time or another he lived with a variety of women, all of whom claimed to be "his legal wife." The story of the one "true love" in Mike's life is a strange and sad one.

Early in his career Mike fell in love with Mary Benson, the daughter of a prosperous businessman in a little community near what is now Brownsville on the Monongahela River. Mary was a slim, pretty brunette who, though she was demure and sensitive and accustomed to all the refinements of life, was nevertheless strongly attracted to the uncouth but vitally masculine riverboatman. Her father, who dominated his daughter completely, would not have approved of the match in any case. But, more important, he was in secret partnership with an Englishman by the name of Taggart, who was the mastermind behind a gang of river pirates. A smooth-talking, wealthy man who sported an impressive veneer of culture, Taggart had had his eye on the young girl for years. When she was seventeen years old, he asked for her hand, and old Benson was more than happy to oblige. Mary hated the sight of Taggart, but she was afraid to defy her father. If Mike had been around to back her up, things might have been different, but at the time he was taking a keel to New Orleans. It was a hurry-up affair. Within a few months the engagement was announced, the banns were published, and Mary and Taggart were married. When Mike returned, his love was safely and irretrievably settled—and pregnant—as Mrs. Taggart.

Mike did not accept his frustration calmly. As a matter

of fact, he went on a bender, tried to kidnap the new Mrs. Taggart, and eventually burned down Taggart's house and drove the newlyweds out of town.

About a year later, Mike took part in a raid on a den of hijackers in a bayou on the Mississippi. Many of the pirates were killed, and the rest escaped into the wilderness. When the raiders stormed into the headquarters of the gang, a dirty old shack hidden in the woods, they found Mary Taggart lying on a rickety cot with an infant in her arms. Wasted from tuberculosis and crushed by the physical and emotional ordeals she had been through since her marriage to Taggart, she looked like a different woman to Mike. The tough riverboatman was sick with grief. Mary told him that they had been forced into hiding when the authorities got wind that Taggart was mixed up with the hijacking gang. She knew she was dying, and she begged Mike to take her infant son, Carpenter, and bring him up as his own boy. Mike promised the girl that he would rear the boy to be an honest riverboatman and swore he would never disclose to him the identity of his real father. Later that night, Mary died in his arms.

From the day Carpenter became his responsibility, Mike never let the boy out of his sight. He took him along on all his voyages on the river. Under the guiding hand of his foster father, Carpenter learned to fight, drink, and shoot, and by the time he was twenty years old, he was an expert river pilot and boatman. Unlike Mike, he was tall and slender, though well muscled, and had blue eyes and blond hair. They were a strange looking "father and son," but Mike always explained the contrast by saying, "he takes after his maw. A reg'lar cornhaired Swede, she was."

Mike was in his fifties now, but no one would have guessed it. His eyes were as bright as they had been at twenty, and his hair was still thick and as black as a raven's wing. Time had left its mark on him only to the extent that years of exposure to the sun had burnished his skin until it was as rich as an Indian's. But time had taken its toll on the once high estate of the riverboatman. In the 1820's the

steamboat had all but made the keelboat obsolete and had pushed the lesser boats off the Mississippi altogether. Bitter about the comedown of his proud calling, Mike retired.

After a period of drunken idleness that saw the first visible ravages of age creep up on him, he signed up to be a trapper and hunter for the Mountain Fur Company, located in an old fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. He and Carpenter enjoyed the vigorous outdoor life and the long tramps through the forest. Life at the fort was good, except for one thing. There was a government regulation that prohibited the sale or consumption of intoxicating beverages at the trading posts. This nettled all of the men, but particularly Mike Fink. He had frequent run-ins with the post commander, Major Henry, on this score, and finally stormed off the post in a fit of rage and set up quarters for Carpenter and himself in a dry cave on the bank of the river. The arrangement worked well for a while. Mike reported at the fort every day and did the jobs that were assigned to him. Then at night he and Carpenter would retire to their cave and play host to their friends from the fort with a big supply of liquor that they had laid in.

Shortly after this, there were two new arrivals at the fort. A little white-haired man named Talbott was hired to take over the gunsmith duties of the Mountain Fur Company. With him came his seventeen-year-old daughter, Jane. From the moment they met, handsome Carpenter Fink and pretty Jane Talbott weren't good for anything but mooning over one another, and Mike Fink began to behave like a jealous father. The very first time he laid eyes on the gunsmith, Mike displayed open hostility toward the man. Talbott had come away white-faced and shaken from the encounter. The other men had winked wisely and grinned. "Fink was like to explode when he saw the way his boy eyed that gal of Talbott's," they said. "'Fraid he'll lose Carpenter to her, the old fool."

But as time went on, the situation ceased to be a joking matter. Mike's hatred for the Talbotts was becoming mani-

acal. Once, in the height of a drunken bout, he tried to strangle the gunsmith, and it took half the burly woodsmen in the fort to pull him off. After that, Talbott never went anywhere without a brace of pistols in his belt, and he swore that he would quit the fort as soon as his contract was up. Mike continued to grow uglier by the day. Whenever he was in Talbott's presence, he had the look of a cat crouched behind a bush, waiting for an unwary bird to stray within striking distance. He began to neglect his job and, finally, stopped going to the fort at all. For weeks he stayed holed up in the cave, drinking heavily, and refusing even to come out for his rations. Carpinter patiently took food to him and made him eat, but the youth's nerves and loyalty were wearing thin.

"You've got to stop seein' that wench. She's not your kind," Mike would harangue the boy doggedly.

"I ain't gonna listen to you talk like that, Mike," Carpinter would say quietly. "Jane's a fine girl." When he could endure the taunts no longer, the boy would leap to his feet, pale and trembling, and stalk out of the cave with Mike yelling after him, "She's a bitch! Bitch! Bitch!" After one especially violent argument, they didn't speak to each other for days.

Deploring the growing rift between Mike and his son, a group of their friends—former boatmen—at the fort went down to the cave and tried to patch things up. They approached the delicate task shrewdly, pretending that their visit was just a friendly one. For hours they sat around drinking with Mike and Carpinter, reminiscing about the "good old days" on the river and talking about the happy experiences they had all shared together. Gradually, Mike began to come around. A spark of the old fire gleamed in his eyes, and he entered into the story-telling and the joke-telling with some of his old-time gusto. At the height of the party, they all trooped outside on the river and got up some shooting and wrestling matches. Mike won all the events and was in high spirits. About the only person who wasn't enjoying himself was Carpinter. He kept to himself, swig-

ging at a bottle until he was glassy-eyed and looking more morose than ever. Every time Mike glanced his way and smiled, the boy would avoid his eyes. But Mike was in a forgiving mood. At last he went over and put his arm around Carpenter.

"We've both been actin' persnickety, son," he said. "But I love you and I know you love me. Let's make it up."

Carpenter looked him square in the eye and said seriously, "I'd like that, Mike. But there's one thing you gotta know first. I'm gonna marry Jane Talbott, and nothin' you do will change my mind."

Mike swallowed hard and blinked a few times. Then he let out a long breath that made his whole body shudder. "Let there be no more talk about it . . . Lad, will you shoot the cup with me?"

There was a round of cheers from the other men. This was a sure sign that everything was going to be all right. Mike and Carpenter had probably shot the cup more than any two boatmen on the river. They always had welcomed the slightest excuse to demonstrate how absolute was their confidence, trust, and respect for each other. Before Carpenter could answer, he was helped to his feet, and a rifle was pushed into his hand. Mike walked off fifty paces, and a tin cup was placed on his head and filled with liquor. A few onlookers frowned at the way the rifle barrel weaved as the boy took aim, but most of them were too drunk to pay too much attention. There was an instant of silence, and then the gun boomed. The tin cup went sailing end over end through the air, spraying whisky in all directions and landing with a clang about thirty feet in back of Mike. Standing very still, Mike put his hand to his scalp. It came away smeared with blood. The woodsmen swarmed around him.

"It's just a scratch," Mike's voice was strangely quiet. "Here, get outta me way." He walked to where Carpenter was standing. "I taught you to shoot better than that son."

Carpenter's face was bloodless, and his lower lip quivered as he spoke. "I'm sorry, Mike. I aimed too low."

"Maybe yuh aimed too *high*."

"Mike! I—"

"Fergit it, boy. You'll never do it agin." Mike snatched the rifle.

When Mike drew a bead on the cup on Carpenter's head, you could almost hear the tension singing in the warm summer air like electricity before a thunderstorm. There was a loud crash. A neat round hole appeared in the middle of Carpenter's forehead, and he pitched forward, his fair head digging into the soft black earth of the riverbank. Mumbling incoherently, Mike weaved past a gauntlet of accusing eyes and dropped to his knees by the lifeless form. He began to cry and babble like an hysterical woman, and many of the trappers turned away from the sight. "Son! Son! Son!" he shrieked. "I didn't want to do it! God's my judge! I didn't want to do it!"

A little later, the gunsmith was working at his bench in the fort when he heard the door slam open behind him. He swung around sharply. "Mike Fink!" Instinctively, he backed away from the demented-looking figure blocking the doorway, his eyes darting desperately to the two pistols that lay within easy reach on the bench. "What do you want?"

"You heard about Carpenter?"

"I did!" the gunsmith hissed. "You're a mad beast, Fink. My girl's half crazy with grief. You belong in a cage. What kind of a man would kill his own son? Only an animal!"

"He wasn't my son . . . Taggart!"

The gunsmith looked ill. "What are you talkin' about? Why do you call me that?"

"Twenty years don't change you that much, Taggart. Don't lie. It don't make no difference now. Until today, all I could think about was twistin' your skinny neck, but I figger that's too good for you. Maybe what I'm gonna tell you will hurt you worse."

The gunsmith licked his lips. "What have you got to tell me, Fink?"

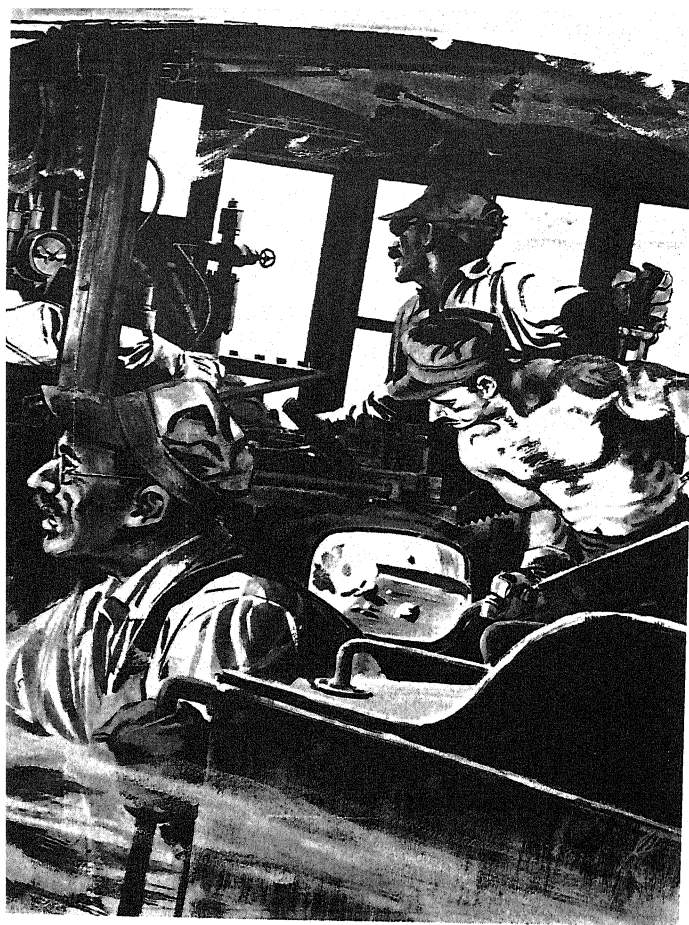
Mike slumped in the doorway. "Carpenter was your

son, Taggert. Mary Benson's boy . . . And your daughter Jane's brother."

An obscene noise gurgled up from the gunsmith's throat. He sprang to the bench, snatched up the two pistols, and emptied them into Mike's chest. Stepping across the dead body, he spit in the upturned face, tormented even in death. "Rot in hell, Mike Fink!"

Although there never was any question of his being prosecuted for shooting Fink, Talbott—or Taggert—left the fort with his daughter shortly after the incident. Two months later he was drowned when he fell off a Mississippi keelboat. Some say the ghost of Mike Fink helped him along with a push.

Maybe it did, and maybe it didn't, but one thing is sure. The King of the Keelboatmen still sails the muddy waters of the old Mississippi and still stands at the bars in New Orleans and St. Louis and Natchez and Louisville—and will, as long as there are riverboatmen to navigate the tricky channels afloat and raise a little hell ashore. Mike Fink is one of them forever.



The Great Georgia Mail Train Race

The odds were one hundred to one against him, but Lodge didn't have a head for figures. With a prayer on his lips and his hand on the whistle, he gave her the gun till she hit 120.

CLYDE CARLEY

Out of the murky gloom of the train sheds at Savannah Union Station, a gloom intensified by the hushed hour of three o'clock in the morning and a Georgia coastal fog, two trains of identical length charged onto their respective southbound mains within less than a minute of each other, and began a race for Jacksonville, Florida.

Sleek, trim engines under light loads, they accelerated rapidly, throttles open to the last notch they would take without wheels slipping. The staccato beat of the two locomotives gathering speed was a reminder to the few early-rising watchers that the winner of this race would bring to its railroad a mail contract worth better than \$100,000 a year.

It was probably the last race permitted, as such, on American railroads. And, on the face of it, an impossibly one-sided contest. Both were special trains with unrestricted running orders; both had the finest equipment available and picked crews; and each had four cars of U. S. mail with the wheels still hot from the Washington run. But their differing routes to Jacksonville made one the underdog by a margin of thirty-seven mileposts. The Seaboard Air Line Railroad between the two towns was a 135-mile, straight-south line with a map profile something like an unbent archer's bow; the Plant System's roadbed lay southwesterly all the way to

Waycross, Georgia, where it right-angled back toward Jacksonville for a total of 172 miles.

The Plant System's train would need its slight head-start.

The two roads of single track roughly paralleled one another for the first fifteen miles or so out of Savannah, so that each crew could hear the other's challenging whistle, see smoke thrown skyward, and occasionally glimpse the glaring firebox and lights of the other train when the fog lightened. The Seaboard's crew confidently expected to be in Jacksonville and claim the fat prize at least half an hour ahead of the Plant System special, but they poured on the coal to overcome that slight starting advantage, determined to have no hare-and-tortoise tricks sprung on them.

The two trains rolled and howled through the sloppy raw night, and neither could lose the other in the first ten miles. Two locomotives tuned fiddle-tight stabbed the blackness with their headlights at seventy miles an hour and better, filling the Georgia lowlands with a rushing roar and whine, and the start of the race seemed to confirm that only mileage would decide the battle. If you liked underdog long-shots, you could have had at least ten-to-one that Plant's train was already beaten.

And five minutes later you could have had one hundred-to-one; that is, just before faint-hearted railroaders decided that Plant's Engine 107 had run herself clear out of the race before it was well started. Rank-smelling smoke came up to Engineer Ned Leake's nose, greasy fumes from beneath his cab, and he felt, rather than heard, a serious misbeat that caused him to push the throttle half closed. Soon they were "limping and stinking" at a sedate thirty mph.

"Seems like a hotbox on one of the drivers," Leake said to his fireman. "Take a look, will you?"

Fireman Kendall opened the door fronting his seat and stepped cautiously forward on the catwalk of the moving engine, holding to the side piping. Even by kneeling and leaning out, not much could be seen in the blur of whipping driverods and the feathers of steam escaping from the

cylinder-heads. He peered up and down, but couldn't spot the trouble.

"Must be on your side," he came back to tell the engineer. "It's a red-hot one, anyway. Plenty more smoke out there."

The Plant special continued to reduce speed and coasted into Burroughs, only twelve miles on its way, at a walking pace. And stopped, when it should have blown through this village with only a whistle acknowledgment. The crew piled off to investigate the spot where their hopes were burning away in the packing of a journal box—a blazing hotbox by now—on the bearing of the main or center drive-wheel. The fireman soon had the journal cooling under a stream of water from a hose, and another crewman came up with new packing, but the overheated end of a locomotive axle doesn't cool like a hot wire. You can only stand and wait. Ten, fifteen minutes; twenty before it's repacked, at best.

A couple of hundred feet below the Burroughs station, the two railroads crossed. Thus the waiting was aggravated for Plant's men, by the cheerless sight of the Seaboard mail clattering over the crossing frogs and taking a bow, by your leave, in the spotlight provided by the crippled Plant System engine. A trainman waved a red lantern derisively from the rear platform as the Seaboard special hooted and highballed south again. Gloom and renewed fog closed in around the little train with the big ambitions, all thoroughly stalled.

It was March of 1901. The government had decided their Cuban mail pouches must be put on a faster schedule, one reason being that occupation troops from the Spanish-American War of 1898 were to remain on the island until the following year. Then, as now, two lines ran down the Eastern seacoast, with not much to choose between them—the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard Air Line—but in that year, the ACL's track ended at Charleston, south of there being the Plant System's operation. Plant had the impertinence to bid on the new mail contract. The Post Office Department announced wisely, and with straight faces, that

eight cars of mail would be delivered at Savannah and split between the rival roads. Winner take all, by showing up first in Jacksonville. For this trial, a steam packet would take the mail at Jacksonville for the Havana run. Realistically, the postal officials regarded the contest across Georgia as a mere necessary formality: what railroad in that era, if put to a speed test, could overcome the handicap of thirty-seven extra miles on a nominally four-hour run?

In another year the Atlantic Coast Line was to absorb the Plant System, legally known as the Savannah, Florida & Western, and complete the Nahunta cut-off to drop straight south from Jesup to Folkston, but now Plant's only rails extended via Waycross and cut back across the northeast corner of Okefenokee Swamp, where wagon trails sometimes disappear like a submerging alligator. Your highway map today will point up the difference in the two routes: Seaboard's line came down (as it still does) through Riceboro, Warsaw, Thalmann, Woodbine, and Yulee, bending gently only far enough to avoid inland waters; while the Plant System's haul can be nearly duplicated to Waycross, thence U.S. No. 1 to Jacksonville. This unequal situation was now complicated by Plant's main-driver hotbox—comparable to a relay runner breaking his leg—while Seaboard's train whistled gaily on.

Engineer Leake was not a patient man. Bathing the overheated bearing in oil, he put it to the test again and eased out on the throttle. There was just time to breathe a sigh of relief and pass the hamlet of Ways, another four miles, but not time to try for a respectable speed before it began pouring off acrid smoke once more. Here was a "bad-order" case the shop mechanics would have to cure. They poked along like a drag freight, seldom over fifteen mph, until a red-order board held them at Fleming—as if they wouldn't have been forced to stop anyway. They had used up an hour and covered only twenty-four miles.

The Fleming operator handed over a message from the chief dispatcher in Savannah. The latter had been advised of the trouble at Burroughs and ordered that, if the engine

was still running hot, the special should be held at Fleming until another engine arrived with a later train. That decision, for what it was worth, had already been made. Riding the head-end with Leake that day to supervise this operational gamble was Traveling Engineer James (Uncle Jimmy) Ambrose, who knew that on train No. 23, which regularly left Savannah at 3:30 A.M., southbound, there was a practically brand-new engine.

No. 23 was due in Fleming at 4:17 A.M. The special's crew took the siding, there to stew, curse, and watch up the track until she pulled in about 4:20. Being aware of the mail train's slowdowns, her engineer had taken no chances of running up on the special in a "cornfield meet."

That engineer was Albert Lodge. Mark him well: Iron-gray, soot-stained veteran of about fifty years of age, he was huge of frame and an infallibly calm chewer of tobacco. Lodge, of course, would go with his engine when the switch was made. It was a railroading era of few "name" trains, but many locomotives were named for officials, often for the engineer who had served almost all his years on a cab's right side with the same engine.

The locomotive coming off No. 23 sported no name, only the number—111—on the cab side. She had come from the Rhode Island Locomotive Works only six months before, a "ten-wheeler" or 4-6-0 wheel arrangement, which meant a four-wheel leading truck, six driving wheels, and no trailing truck. The last pair of drivers—which stood seventy-three inches from the railhead—juttied up under the cab almost under the feet of engineer and fireman. She was a little black-and-silver bandbox, her crossheads, siderods, and driver tires of steel polished to a gleam.

The switching, coupling, and testing of air brakes could be hurried only so much; the mail special was on its way again shortly after 4:30 A.M. Exact records are scarce at this point, due to a fire in the Savannah offices a few years later, but the gap is only in the next thirty-three miles to Jesup. It is certain that this lap was made in less than thirty-three

minutes, the train arriving in Jesup as daylight broke at about 5:00 A.M.

With his new orders, Engineer Lodge had inherited from No. 107 an extra coal-passer; the speeds planned for the special would keep him busy sweating just scooping coal into the roaring firebox. And at Jesup, where they stopped three minutes for water and Lodge oiled around his engine carefully, another official clambered up the gangway: Dan S. McClellan, an Atlantic Coast Line dispatcher, who had come up from Waycross on a freight to meet the special, mostly out of curiosity to see if Plant had a chance.

Besides giving away thirty-seven miles, the Plant mail special had left Fleming more than hour late on its tentative schedule. No more than a few minutes had been made up—possibly making it now an even hour late—into Jesup. Dispatcher McClellan doubted that the Plant outfit would now try to do more than deliver the mail the same day, rather than keep it as a souvenir. Engineer Albert Lodge turned out to be a man of different mind. Few writers of railroad history have bothered with his story, possibly because no song was written about him. It may be that the short run into Jesup was needed to get his pet engine hot—and not overly-hot in just one place—as it is well-known that locomotives, being of feminine gender, are more temperamental than violins and must get that fine glow all over for best performance. Or it might be that the traveling engineer (now called a road foreman of engines) dropped a few hints to Lodge that Uncle Jimmy didn't want on the record. Or that Engineer Lodge first had time at Jesup to understand fully the scope of his new running orders which, while preserved, ran about like this:

TO CONDUCTOR & ENGINEER, ALL TRAINS: MAIL
SPECIAL SOUTHBOUND FROM SAVANNAH
3:05 A.M. TO JACKSONVILLE AS EXTRA NO. 1
HAS RIGHT OVER ALL TRAINS ON ROAD. ALL
OTHER TRAINS TAKE SIDING AT OPEN TELE-
GRAPH OFFICES THIRTY MINUTES BEFORE

SPECIAL IS DUE. EACH CONDUCTOR AND ENGINEER TO BE HELD PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURING AND LOCKING MAIN-LINE SWITCHES.

It was a Form 31 order, requiring the signature of every engineer and conductor who received a copy and confirmation of their signing by wire back to the dispatcher. Engineer Lodge, long accustomed to hauling No. 23 back and forth with stops at every town big enough for a depot, averaging just over thirty mph, had never had such a set of orders handed him. Few men have.

Whatever he thought, and he was not a talkative man, he ripped out of Jesup with a white feather over her back, as they say of engines popping the safety valve, and turned No. 111 loose. There were still patches of fog in the gray hills as the sun tried for an opening, and Lodge hung on the whistle cord. The best of modern steam engines require about seven minutes from standing start to hit a clip above sixty mph with an average passenger train.

Lodge and his "Three Aces" knocked off the twelve miles to Screven in nine minutes, and hit something better.

"This train is going awful fast," said Uncle Jimmy Ambrose, hanging on to his part of the bench behind the fireman. It was his job to know when trains were going fast.

McClellan agreed with a nod, well occupied himself with keeping steady footing on the engine's heaving deck. The two men fished out their watches, a pair of 21-jewel "standards," checked periodically by certified watch inspectors.

"Let's time her from Screven to milepost 74," McClellan said. There was a siding at the seventy-four-mile marker, later to be a town named Satilla. Just beyond was the Satilla bridge.

Engineer Lodge didn't hear them; he couldn't have in the uproar No. 111 was making. The bark of her stack settled into one continuous whooshing roar, the whip of her drivers made them a flashing blur, nearly invisible, and the

coal-passer sweated and heaved coal in a steady stream to her raging firebox. Lodge gave him a signal to keep it up.

Here was straightaway track, and here No. 111 leaped ahead on the rails as if trying to leave them; bucking and bouncing, rolling, heaving, diving, flanges screaming on the slightest curve. If you've ever been in the cab of a steam locomotive, then you know bronc-riding terms are appropriate at speed. The old ten-wheelers, such as No. 111, with no trailing truck, but perched squarely on the pounding drivers with no springs worth the name, were mechanical beasts gone wild. The cab's iron deck and wooden frame seemed to be suspended in air just behind the high churning drive-wheels, which flirted it from side to side with every bobble in the rails, as the engine-tender couplers popped and snarled and the deck plates crashed. And Engineer Lodge hung on his whistle cord and stared down the track as the sun came timidly out.

They blasted past the facing-point switch for 74-siding faster than any rule book ever allowed around such switches, and Uncle Jimmy compared watches with Dispatcher Dan McClellan. They matched to the second. Both men freshened their grips and put away the watches grimly.

The mail special had just blazed five miles at 120 miles per hour.

Screven to milepost 74, as marked by surveying engineers for crewmen to read; five miles in two and one-half minutes.

Lodge pinched her down a few notches for the river bridge, but they still shook the girders like a willow's branches in a freezing wind, and he let her out again on the slight upgrade that followed.

It was 1901, and the fine-quilled wail of Casey Jones' whistle was no longer heard in Mississippi. Only a year earlier, short-flagged and speeding, he had run his engine into a freight, fouling the main line. Old 97, the Southern Railway's pride, earning \$140,000 a year on a mail contract, had another two years to run before Joseph "Steve" Broady

took her down White Oak Mountain too fast or without air brakes, or maybe both, and dumped the works off a trestle into Cherrystone Creek. Both these storied engineers, like Lodge with the Plant special on this day, drove 4-6-0 ten-wheelers, by different builders, but of the same general specifications, with giant drivers intended more for speed than traction. And all got it.

The four men in the rocketing cab with Engineer Lodge were not too happy making history so fast. The rails of that day were mostly sixty pounds to the yard, none over sixty-seven-pound weight for this stretch—thin steel strings by later standards of minimum one hundred-pound rail to support and restrain crack trains; ballast was a casual affair of cinders, crushed sea shell, or gravel, where today rock ballast is almost mandatory; curves had little or no elevation of the outside rail. One of the commonest causes of wrecks was the spread rail, spikes torn away from soft or split ties. Nobody had yet dreamed of a rail-detector device to spot defective rails before they shattered without warning.

All these things were acutely known to the men clutching for handholds and the laboring coal-passer who staggered from tender to fire door and back incessantly. They knew, too, that as early as 1893, the New York Central's Engine 999 had posted a record 112.5 mph, but that had been only a one-mile spurt, part of it downgrade also, and not all railroad men accepted the Central's World Fair-conscious press agent's word for it.

No. 111 howled and rampaged through Patterson and Blackshear, checked down now to flashes of ninety and one hundred mph on the tangents, and blew into Waycross on the dot of 5:30.

Now they might be said to be back in the running, a home stretch of seventy-five miles to go—with the treacherous, deserted, straggling ribbons of rail across Okefanokee Swamp coming up. From Lodge's one stop at Jesup, they had reeled off the forty miles to Waycross in twenty-eight minutes, an average well enough above eighty mph to

justify a stop and quick oil-around at Waycross, where yard conditions and the sharp turn eastward would have them slowed to a trot anyway. In setting up this train, Plant officials had calculated that if it could average fifty mph, they might beat the Seaboard by whatever margin they could exceed that average.

Mr. Lodge by now had figured his own process of stringing a train, which was a solemn rite conducted by officials, with string and pegs indicating stations, to figure a new schedule. Neither smelling nor seeing anything amiss at Waycross, he was back in his seat, goggles down, and had her rolling again within one minute. Through Broganza and Fort Mudge, Engine 111 fought to regain her best speed, nursed by an engineer who yelled, "Keep that coal coming, boy; I got a lot of whistling to do." Beyond Fort Mudge, he had her controls lined up again and the volcanic sky-streamers from her proud stovepipe stack was that fine gray mushrooming that means a steam engine is working her best. On through the tiny settlement of Race Pond. In the swamp, the alligators blinked and flopped away, and gay-colored cranes squawked fearfully and beat their wings to escape this suddenly-came-and-suddenly-gone, fire-breathing monster.

The four-car train on her tail was no more than a steady influence on Engine 111. Her crew consisted of Conductor Lindsey Kirkland, Flagman Al Knight, and a porter whose name has not survived. Conductor Kirkland was seldom quoted on the ride in newspapers of the time. "It wouldn't be printable," he told one reporter.

It was between Race Pond and Uptonville that the coal-passer voiced a feeling held by every man in the cab, possibly excepting the nerveless Mr. Lodge. They were nearing milepost 120, and all of them had been over the line often enough to remember there was a wicked curve at that point.

"Charlie," the coal-heaver called to Fireman Charles Johnson, "don't you suppose he's goin' to shut off now?"

The firemen could see that curve rushing at them, one

with scarcely any bank to it—the dead swamp waiting to bury an engine.

“Naw,” said the ash-cat, “he’s just got going good.”

Then he wished he hadn’t said it; it didn’t sound right for a man’s last words. Lodge seemed to heed the scoop’s desperate wish. He closed the throttle three notches when about 150 yards from the curve. Then he suddenly hauled the lever open by *five* notches and his engine leaped at the curve, bucking and battering the outside rail. A speeding engine doesn’t turn smoothly; the flanges hit the rail, bounce back as it rolls on, and return again and again to try and climb that outer rail. The men were shaken like sticks in a hopper. Engine 111 staggered nearer the ditch than she had been any time that day.

Uncle Jimmy grabbed McClellan. McClellan grabbed the hot pipes on the boiler’s backhead. “You know,” he said later, “those steam pipes actually felt cool right then.” He held on.

The locomotive bucked with the lateral motion set up by the curve, rolling drunkenly for another one hundred yards after coming out of it, then settled down to her voracious mile-eating with the pace unbroken. It is probable that the 120 mph speed was attained again along here, but nobody was in the mood for timing it until Lodge began to narrow down on his steam for Folkston. They were in the yards at 5:51 A.M. These thirty-three miles from Waycross had been run in twenty-five minutes.

Jacksonville was forty-two miles away, and now they were out of the swamps. But Lodge wasn’t satisfied and kept the high-wheeler boiling at eighty to ninety, until they had passed Dyal, where, he calculated, with an engineer’s sense of time and distance, that he had finally pulled Plant’s fat out of the fire and was now back on the special’s planned schedule. Thereafter, he rolled on at a sedate seventy to eighty.

After the Burroughs breakdown, there had been a wide distance between the Seaboard and Plant tracks, and no telegraph reports handed up to them. Unless the Seaboard

engineer had gotten into Lodge's frame of mind, they might expect to make it nip-and-tuck going into Jacksonville, and possibly see Seaboard smoke in the sky on the city's outskirts. With Seaboard's shorter mileage, however, if the mail engineer had pinned her ears back over just one long stretch in the manner of the Three Aces, then the race was lost.

Engine 111 pranced into the yard limits at Jacksonville with her bell caroling stridently, steam spewing at the safety, and edged into the Union Terminal at 6:30 A.M.

The Seaboard mail was nowhere in sight.

Dan McClellan and Uncle Jimmy Ambrose climbed cautiously down to the ground on the fireman's ladder. Perhaps they thought this madman engineer was best left to himself. Albert Lodge spat out his tasteless cud of tobacco, spoke to the fireman about making sure of the tie-down adjustments on No. 111, and walked with the crewmen down the street to their favorite beanery for breakfast.

Besides moving faster than any man ever had in his own machine—both the doings at Kitty Hawk with airplanes and the first successful automobile trip across the United States were to come in 1903—Lodge had pulled the special up to an average of 51.3 mph for the whole trip, counting all delays, a figure officially hoped for as a winner. From Fleming, where he took over, he had made the 148 miles in an average seventy-four mph, and from Jesup had finished 115 miles at an average 76.6 mph.

Four years later, in Ohio, the *Pennsylvania Limited* made a three-mile speed effort and hit 127 mph behind a 4-4-0 engine built in Pennsy's shops. Otherwise, the Plant record stood unchallenged until 1934, when the Union Pacific unleashed a streamliner on Nebraska prairies and averaged the same 120 mph for nine miles.

It was a trip that Dispatcher McClellan never regretted, once his burned hands had healed. He recounted the details for friends after his retirement, and in 1928 made a notarized affidavit regarding the trip, and again in 1943, to satisfy

the record and answer inquiries from publishers of almanacs and encyclopedias.

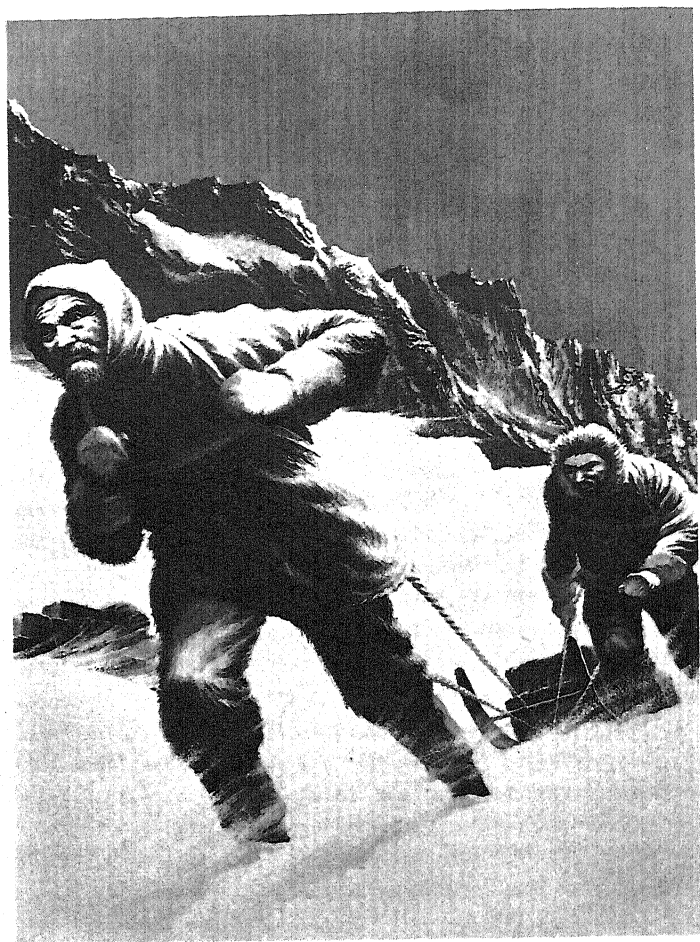
What transpired with the Seaboard was never given full report, their crew showing not much inclination to talk about it. Obviously the Seaboard's mail special made a complacent journey, content with their mileage advantage and the view of the Plant's crippled engine at the Burroughs crossing. Certainly they seldom exceeded the rule book's fifty-five mph speed limit, averaging under forty, and fully expected, as they steamed into Jacksonville, that the Plant's special was still fighting across the Okefenokee Swamp—if not still shooting water on a hotbox.

The Seaboard arrived in the station just before 7:00 A.M., and one Conductor Glass stepped inside to inquire smugly of the telegraph operator: "You heard anything on the Plant's mail trap? We passed them at Burroughs with an old broken-down engine. This ought to teach them not to bid against a real railroad."

Dispatcher McClellan was standing at the train-register desk.

"Mister," he said, "it seems that Plant has more than one engine. We've been here half an hour, and the mail that took the prize is halfway to Cuba by now."

"I'll be damned!" said Conductor Glass, his jowls dropping sadly. "They must have put wings on that other engine."



Shackleton of the Antarctic

The long trek to the South Pole meant more than glory. A man was battling for personal honor, and the stakes were four human lives.

JOHN ROSS

Heads turned in surprise as a bronzed, broad-shouldered figure moved through the throng of scientists, explorers, and Empire officials that had gathered for the annual Royal Geographical Society meeting.

"Isn't that Shackleton?" one bearded gentleman asked, nudging a companion.

"What's he doing in London?" another wanted to know.

The flurry of excitement was understandable. Sub-lieutenant Ernest Shackleton, Royal Naval Reserve, had sailed off as the third officer of the British National Antarctic Expedition in 1901. He had not been expected to return for another year. In the excitement, an ugly rumor was circulated concerning Shackleton's premature return to London. It was said that he had broken down completely on the strenuous journey to the South Pole and had to be hauled back to the main base on a sledge, adding to the already heavy burden of his mates. But that was not true.

Captain Robert Scott, who was in charge of the expedition, had hand-picked Shackleton and Dr. Edward A. (Billy) Wilson to accompany him on the dash to the Pole after studying them carefully during the early phases of the expedition. They started from their base near McMurdo Sound on November 2, 1902, with three sledges and nineteen Siberian dogs. An advance party had set out ration and supply depots at two points to lighten the sledge load

of the main party and to provide important food and necessities for the return march.

Bad luck overwhelmed Scott at the very start. A savage blizzard struck on the second day, confining the party to their tiny tent for two long days and upsetting the timetable that was linked very closely to the food supply. When the weather cleared, they ran into other problems. The dogs found the deep snow too difficult and the loads too heavy, and the men suffered almost constantly from snow blindness.

The dogs began to die early in December, and Scott and his men realized they would soon be forced to pull the sledges themselves. On December 14, they made a depot of everything that could be spared, to lighten the load, and placed it near latitude eighty degrees, thirty minutes south.

They all had a good meal on Christmas Day, but that was the last time on the journey that they turned in with full stomachs. On the last day of the year, Wilson, suffering badly from snow blindness, had to be blindfolded. Progress again was slowed. Then a vast mountain range loomed up in front of them, and they began to wonder if there was an accessible route to the Pole. An all-out effort was made to reach some smaller red cliffs to the west, but after they passed through a snow gully, a vertical ice cliff with an overhanging summit more than seventy feet high blocked the march again. Scott, making a careful estimate of the situation, turned his back on the Pole. "We camp here tonight, men," he announced, "and tomorrow we head for home."

On the return journey it was "drag, drag and drive, drive from the time we got up till it was time to turn in," according to Shackleton. There was just enough food on the sledges to last two weeks, meaning that they would have to average more than seven miles a day on the march. The last of the dogs were shot and butchered to help stretch the rations, but when they reached the depot on January 14, all three men had scurvy.

Shackleton had to be blindfolded for three days, but he continued to pull his load. When his snow blindness eased

off, scurvy began to weaken him further. His case was the most severe. He began to have fits of coughing, causing serious hemorrhages, but he insisted on plodding along for the nine or ten miles of the daily march. As his condition worsened, Scott ordered Shackleton to discontinue his heavy work. But not once did he collapse; nor was he pulled on the sledge, as was rumored in London. When Scott and his men marched into base camp on February 7—after ninety-four days of trail-blazing—Shackleton was marching along with them, staggering a little, but still on his feet.

Shackleton protested bitterly when the expedition doctor ordered him invalided home, by way of New Zealand, on the relief ship *Morning*. When the *Morning* slipped cautiously through the ice-clogged waters of Antarctica a few weeks later, he made a silent vow as he stood on her deck. "I'll see you again," he promised, as he surveyed the vast whiteness of the enchanted continent. Like so many before him, he had succumbed to the lure of Antarctica. He had lost the first round—but he would be back.

When the cruel London gossip reached his ears, his determination to head southward again mounted. Captain Scott, upon his return in 1904, publicly denied the damaging stories about Shackleton, but this was lame consolation to the twenty-nine-year-old ex-naval officer. There was only one way to repair his reputation, he felt.

Shackleton hoped to stir up interest in his own Antarctic expedition as soon as Captain Scott returned in 1904. Aside from his own hunger for vindication, he felt it would be wise for Britain to follow up the remarkable strides made by Scott, since several other nations were beginning to show keen interest in Antarctica too. He knew little about the heartaches of fund-raising, but he soon realized that the task of financing a journey to the South Pole was almost as arduous as the actual journey itself.

For the next three years, Shackleton made little headway with his plans. In the meantime, he married Emily May Dorman and tried various means of making a living. He edited a magazine and then became secretary of the

Scottish Geographical Society. Next, he tossed his hat into the political ring and made a futile effort to be elected to Parliament. A plan to create an international news agency also failed.

It was while he was serving as technical adviser to a shipbuilder, late in 1906, that Shackleton decided the time was ripe for a return to the Antarctic. Encouraged by the promise of financial aid from his boss, Sir William Beardmore, the shipbuilder, he worked out his plan. In February, 1907, he outlined the plan to the Royal Geographical Society, stressing that his intention was not merely a bid to reach the South Pole first. "I do not intend to sacrifice the scientific utility of the expedition to a mere record-breaking journey," he told them. "But, frankly, one of my great efforts will be to reach the South Pole."

Actually, Shackleton's scheme called for three parties: One was to cross the ice barrier into King Edward Land; another was to head for the south magnetic pole; and, of course, the third, under Shackleton's personal leadership, would aim for the geographical Pole itself.

To line up a crew for the journey, Shackleton wrote the "help wanted" ad that has since become famous in the annals of advertising:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

More surprising than the text of the advertisement was the fact that more than four hundred applicants responded. Only twelve were selected for the expedition party.

Shackleton had his eye on a new Norwegian ship, built especially for polar work, but the price proved too high. He had to settle for the somewhat dilapidated, forty-year-old *Nimrod*, a small sealer that reeked of rancid seal oil. It was cleaned up and refitted, and proved to be a stout-hearted ship in the trying months that followed.

His experience on the Scott expedition had caused Shackleton to lose faith in dogs on the trail. He planned to

take a few on his trip, but for emergency use only. For heavy pulling, he decided to use Manchurian ponies, hardy, sure-footed animals accustomed to rough work in Siberia.

Fifteen of them were shipped to New Zealand, where the *Nimrod* picked them up on the way to Antarctica.

A three years' supply of food, ready-to-assemble huts, scientific instruments, stoves, clothing, bedding, and an automobile converted for possible use on the hard surface of the ice barrier were packed into the hold of the *Nimrod*. Her anchor was lifted on October 31, 1907, at Dover. At long last, Shackleton was off on the adventure he had thirsted for—the chance to prove himself to the world.

The voyage to New Zealand was slow and uneventful. Either under steam or sail, the *Nimrod* proved to be a much slower ship than had been anticipated. Since she could carry only a small stock of coal, Shackleton decided that the *Nimrod* would have to be towed out of New Zealand as far as the Antarctic Circle, in order to conserve her fuel supply for the rough, ice-laden waters beyond that point. It was a wise solution to a knotty problem. In the tow of the *Koonya*, a powerful steel steamer, the *Nimrod* departed from New Zealand on New Year's Day, 1908. The Antarctic Circle was reached on January 14, and the *Koonya* was happy to cut loose after the hectic, fifteen hundred-mile tow and head back home. The *Nimrod*, under her own steam now, pussyfooted through a flotilla of moving icebergs and made amazing progress in the perpetual daylight of the Antarctic summer. Entering the Ross Sea, she encountered no pack ice, and Shackleton was overjoyed at the sudden change in their fortunes. The Great Ice Barrier was sighted on the twenty-third, placing the expedition many days ahead of its schedule.

When the *Nimrod* approached Balloon Inlet, its destination, Shackleton was stunned to discover that the inlet no longer existed—miles of the ice barrier had been lopped off to form a wide bay. As they maneuvered for another anchorage, the menacing pack ice, which had been strangely missing until then, suddenly began to move in on them. At

one point, the *Nimrod*, in serious danger of being crushed, barely escaped disaster by backing up at full speed.

The probing for a suitable landing place continued for days under the most nerve-wracking conditions. A heavy fog, a terrible hazard in ice-jammed water, suddenly settled over them. The *Nimrod's* coal was running dangerously low, and each day that she remained in the area increased the risk of her being frozen in for the winter. On top of this, Shackleton had promised Captain Scott that he would stay out of the McMurdo Sound area, where Scott had based his first expedition. The captain had plans for another junket of his own. However, as the crisis mounted, it developed that McMurdo Sound was the only course open to Shackleton, and it was either go back on his word to Scott or return to New Zealand in failure. Ice in the bay prevented the *Nimrod* from reaching Scott's camp at Hut Point, and Shackleton finally decided to set up his base at Cape Royds, twenty miles farther out, at the foot of Mount Erebus. This location added two extra days to the proposed journey to the Pole and was to pose some serious problems for laying down depots on the trail before the onset of the winter night.

The task of unloading the 180 tons of stores and equipment started on February 3. It was backbreaking, round-the-clock work, and Shackleton endeared himself to his men by personally tackling the heaviest and most dangerous jobs and putting in the longest hours. The *Nimrod* headed back to the warmth and safety of New Zealand on February 22, leaving Shackleton and his fourteen adventurers completely isolated from the rest of the world on the apron of the great frozen continent. There was much work to be done before the daylight left completely: huts had to be assembled and made reasonably comfortable for the crew; stables and kennels had to be built for the ponies and dogs; and many other details had to be handled before they settled down to the long and fearsome winter.

Shackleton's plan to lay out depots of provisions for the South Pole party before the sun disappeared had to be

abandoned. The pack ice of McMurdo Sound, which had prevented them from getting closer to the barrier, broke up soon after the *Nimrod* departed, cutting off the path to the south. This was a serious blow to Shackleton's dream of reaching the Pole, although at the time he thought this setback could be overcome by sending out the depot-laying parties early in the spring, when the road southward would be open to them.

The winter routine was well established by the time the inky night fell on the camp. The biologists, meteorologists, and geologists carried on their assigned studies. The ponies and dogs were exercised periodically. And Shackleton, who now became known to his mates simply as "The Boss," polished his plans for the forthcoming dash to the Pole.

The distance from the base at Cape Royds to the South Pole was 860 miles. More than 500 miles of this terrain were completely unknown to Shackleton. To make the journey during the four months of suitable weather, he knew they had to better the six and one-half miles a day achieved on his first expedition with Scott. To accomplish this, he planned to flank the mountains to the west of Scott's route, hoping to avoid the dangerous crevasses and loose snow.

Before the sun returned on August 12, 1908, Shackleton had begun training some of his men for trail work, although considerable time was lost when a terrible blizzard interrupted the program. By the middle of September, all the supplies for the Pole dash had been moved southward to Scott's old camp at Hut Point, and from there the depots were set up. The first depots were established by an advance depot-laying party. The others were set up by the South Pole party itself along the way. Thus, as the party progressed, its load became lighter, and it was assured of food and supplies at strategic points on the return journey.

Two other parties were to explore unknown areas. A northern party was established to seek out the magnetic pole. A western party was to make a geological journey

into the mountains on the opposite side of McMurdo Sound. Shackleton left orders that the *Nimrod*, which was to return to pick up the expedition early in 1909, was not to remain in the sound after March 10. Beyond that date, there was a great risk of her becoming frozen in and crushed.

A severe setback to Shackleton was the loss of most of the Manchurian ponies during the winter. Only four survived to start the trip to the Pole, and their ability to reach the goal appeared extremely doubtful. Without the ponies to pull the heavily-loaded sledges, Shackleton knew he and his men would encounter severe physical hardships on the trail. But on October 29, he and his men were ready to depart for their rendezvous with history. Provisions for ninety-two days had been allowed—about thirty-four ounces per day for each man. The party included Lieutenant J. B. Adams, twenty-eight, a meteorologist; Dr. Eric Marshall, twenty-nine, a surgeon and cartographer; Frank Wild, thirty-five, an experienced polar man; and Shackleton himself, now thirty-four.

Shackleton wrote several letters and left them behind at Cape Royds. They were to be delivered in the event he did not return. The letterhead bore the crest of the Shackleton family with the inscription, "*Fortitudine Vincimus*," "By Endurance We Conquer." Ernest Shackleton was to derive a fuller meaning for these words from this trip to the very end of the earth.

Bright sunshine and a cloudless sky smiled on the southern party as they started the Manchurian ponies down the trail. But on the seventh day out, a roaring blizzard suddenly marked the beginning of the hardships of the trail. For two days they had to take to their tents, consuming precious food supplies without making any advance. Shackleton began to fret. As of November 8, they had covered only fifty-one miles, leaving them still seven hundred miles from the Pole. And even when the blizzard finally blew itself out there would be another critical problem to slow the march—the treacherous crevasses. The great

plain over which they had been making their way was level and easy to negotiate, but the crevasses were a constant danger. They ranged from narrow cracks to great ugly chasms with no visible bottom. The blizzard put an innocent-looking surface of snow over some of these hazards, and every step was a gamble.

The first day out following the blizzard, one of the ponies, named "Chinaman," fell into a three-foot crack, and for a few anxious moments jeopardized the fate of the entire expedition. As the pony struggled in this ever-widening chasm, he threatened to take with him his sledge of vital supplies and his handler. Shackleton and Wild pulled him back to safety just in time. "But when things seem the worst they turn to the best," Shackleton noted in his journal that night. "For that was the last crevasse we encountered, and with a gradually improving surface, we made fair headway."

With good weather, they now began to average fifteen to seventeen miles a day, and on November 15, they reached Depot A, which had been established six weeks earlier by the depot party. To the rations already at the depot, they were able to add about another two days' supply, due to their conservation on the comparatively easy days of travel. Before they made the depot secure, Shackleton reached into his pocket and came up with a can of choice sardines and a pot of black currant jam. Somewhat sadly, he tossed them into the cache. "I was saving them for our Christmas feast," he told his partners, "but before long we'll be feeling every ounce of our loads."

By November 21, the ponies began to wear out from the heavy hauling. Chinaman, who had found the soft underfooting exhausting, was the first to be shot. Working rapidly to prevent the flesh from becoming frozen, Marshall and Wild slaughtered the animal and prepared a good supply of fresh meat for Depot B, as well as for trail rations. Chinaman was to contribute much to the march long after his workhorse days were over.

At each stop on the trail for food and rest, Shackleton

and his men built a mound of snow, six feet high, to serve as a guide post on the return journey. They were approximately five to seven miles apart. The depots were marked by black flags atop long bamboo poles, and were set up about every one hundred miles.

November 26 took on all the gaiety of a New Year's Eve for the trail-blazers. When they settled down at their evening camp, a four-ounce bottle of curacao was uncorked, and their tired eyes twinkled momentarily as they drank a toast. History was being made there in latitude eighty-two degrees, eighteen and one-half minutes south, for Shackleton and his men were the first human beings to set foot that far south. Scott's expedition in 1903 had reached eighty-two degrees, seventeen minutes.

In surpassing Scott's farthest gain, Shackleton and his men had traveled over the level ice barrier. Coming to the end of the barrier, they now faced the awesome task of scaling the enormous mountains that ringed the Polar Plateau. Scott's earlier march had been stopped when he encountered impassable cliffs of ice. Shackleton, hoping to avoid the lofty barriers, had followed a course considerably west of Scott's path, but now he was facing the same problem. To get to the Pole, the hazardous range would have to be crossed.

On November 28, "Grisi" was the second pony to be shot. He was suffering badly from snow blindness and was off his feed. His flesh provided the meat rations for Depot C, but it meant that only two ponies were left to pull twelve hundred pounds on the sledges. Adding to the burden was the strong sun, which sent the temperature up to twenty degrees Fahrenheit. The sudden "heat-wave" taxed the strength of both the men and the ponies. Three days later, Shackleton's favorite pony, "Quan," was played out and had to be finished off.

They reached the base of an isolated summit, about three thousand feet high, on December 2, and Shackleton promptly called a strategy meeting to determine the next move. With only one pony left, the men were doing most

of the sledge-pulling, and it was important to conserve every possible step. They decided to pitch camp and leave the sledge and pony behind, while they scrambled up the granite rocks of the mountain—which they had appropriately named Mount Hope—to reconnoiter a suitable route south. When they reached the top of Mount Hope, Shackleton and his men were momentarily stunned. Stretching before them was the greatest valley glacier known to man—a massive frozen river one hundred miles long and twenty miles wide. Mighty mountains on both sides of the glacier formed a valley that appeared to lead directly to the plateau and the Pole. Shackleton named the phenomenon Beardmore Glacier in honor of the sponsor of the expedition. The great mountains to the west were designated as the Queen Alexandra Mountains; those to the east were named the Commonwealth and Dominion ranges.

Moving "Socks," the only remaining pony, and the two heavily-loaded sledges through the perilous mountain passes in order to reach the foot of the glacier took three days of tense, back-breaking effort. But when this immediate objective was reached, their only reward was the sight of miles of terrible crevasses in the glacier's blue ice. Some were treacherously cloaked by snow; others yawned wide through razor-like edges.

With Socks and Wild pulling one sledge, and Shackleton, Adams, and Marshall hauling the other in the lead, a trail was blazed along the snowy edge of the valley, in order to escape the endless crevasses to the west. It was slow traveling in the deep snow, and Socks frequently sank up to his belly in drifts, as the snow crust gave way under his weight.

On December 7, their reasonably good luck in this precarious area came to an end abruptly. The white silence was suddenly shattered by Wild's panicky shouts. Shackleton, about ten yards ahead, whirled immediately and saw only an end of the sledge sticking out of the snow. Slipping out of their harnesses, Shackleton and his two aides scurried back to the sledge, which was wedged across a chasm.

Wild was hanging on the icy edge by one arm. Socks had disappeared into the crevasse. They pulled Wild and the sledge to safety, but there was no hope for poor Socks. The abyss appeared to be bottomless. Only a miracle had saved Wild and the sledge from following the ill-fated beast, and, indeed, had saved the expedition from disaster. Half the rations and supplies were on that sledge, and without them, Shackleton and his men would have had to turn from the Pole and race back to Cape Royds, with only a slim chance of surviving the ordeal. As it was, the loss of Socks was a severe blow. Shackleton had counted on him to add about 150 pounds of fresh horsemeat to their rations. Now their daily fare, which had been steadily reduced during the march, would have to be cut down to a dangerously low level.

After the damaged sledge was repaired, two two-man pulling teams were set up. Each sledge carried about five hundred pounds of equipment and supplies. The march up the sloping glacier was the most exhausting phase of the whole journey. The crevasses were so bad that the party had to move across some areas in relays, taking one sledge at a time. Each of the four men fell into the chasms, and only their harnesses saved them from death. In three days, only fifteen miles were gained on the Pole. On December 17, Depot E was set up at eighty-five degrees south. They had climbed now to more than six thousand feet above sea level. The temperature dropped radically, and the winds became biting. Shackleton decided to leave as much equipment as possible at this depot and cram the bare necessities for the remaining march on one sledge. It meant that the four men would have to sleep in one small tent, but the energy saved by pulling just one sledge would be well worth this and other inconveniences.

The short rations brought on unceasing hunger, and as they followed the up-hill path, the thought of food was never out of their minds. At dinnertime, when they had had about half a cup of stew, a biscuit, and some tea, Shackleton would try to humor them with talk about his

plans for Christmas. "What a feast it will be," he promised them. "I'll have a few surprises that day and we'll eat our fill." The thoughts of this great day kept them going at a good pace on their near-starvation diet. When December 25 arrived, they were, at last, on the edge of the Polar Plateau, at a height of more than ninety-five hundred feet. It was a white Christmas, to be sure. A strong wind piled the snow in a high mound around the tiny tent, and the temperature dropped to fifteen degrees below zero, but Shackleton's promised feast and the good cheer that followed warmed their spirits and their bodies.

"We had a splendid dinner," Shackleton recorded in his diary that night. "First came *hoosh* (stew) consisting of pony ration boiled up with pemmican and some of our emergency Oxo and biscuit. Then in the cocoa water I boiled our little plum pudding. . . . This, with a drop of medical brandy, was a luxury which Lucullus himself might have envied; then came cocoa, and lastly cigars and a spoonful of *crème de menthe*. We are full tonight, and this is the last time we will be for many a long day. After dinner, discussed the situation, and we have decided to still further reduce our food. We have now nearly five hundred miles, geographical, to do if we are to get to the Pole and back to the spot where we are at this present moment. We have one month's food, but only three weeks' biscuit, so we are going to make each week's food last ten days. We will have one biscuit in the morning, three at midday, and two at night. It is the only thing to do. Tomorrow, we will throw away everything except the most absolute necessities."

The Christmas feast gave them new strength, and for the next two days they made long marches under terrible conditions. The crevasses were behind them, but now there were other menaces. The high altitude caused them to suffer from constant headaches. And with the temperature dropping steadily, the water ran from their inflamed eyes, and the moisture from their breath froze on their beards. Often it caked into a solid mass of ice. They were powerless

to ease this torture because they had left their only pair of scissors back at Depot E. The soft snow on the plateau reduced their progress too, and on December 30, a blinding blizzard swept down from the Pole, forcing them to take shelter in their crowded tent. Frostbite now joined the ranks of the great white enemy.

On New Year's Day, 1909, the march was still uphill. In defiance of the elements, they pushed on for eleven miles more and wrote a new page in the history books. At latitude eight-seven degrees, six and one-half minutes south, Shackleton's party set a new record for polar exploration. No man had approached as close to either Pole. "The Boss" noted the accomplishment in his journal that night, adding: "Everyone done up and weak from the want of food." The next day, Dr. Marshall took the temperatures of the men, and only Wild's exceeded 94° F. The men were weakening rapidly. Their faces were cut, and their fingers and toes were frostbitten. Their clothes and foot-gear were wearing out, and the dilapidated tent could no longer keep out the wind and snow.

On the fourth day of the new year, Shackleton took a terrible gamble by laying down a depot on the open plain to further lighten their burden and speed their progress. The odds against ever finding it again in the heavy, gale-driven snows and poor visibility of the plateau were stacked against them.

"The end is in sight," Shackleton wrote that night. "We can only go for three more days at the most. . . . We left a depot on this great wide plateau, a risk that only this case justified, and one that my comrades agreed to. . . . We are now trusting to our footprints in the snow to guide us back. . . ."

On January 6, "The Boss" looked at his shivering comrades sadly and declared: "Tomorrow we must turn for home."

But the new day brought a new, shrieking blizzard—the worst one yet. The wind blew at ninety miles an hour and whipped heavy snow inside their worn-out tent. For two

days, they huddled together to keep warm. There was nothing else to do; nothing to read, practically nothing to eat. And they wondered now if the blizzard would wipe out their footprints back to the life-or-death depot on the plateau. When the weather cleared on January 9, they left the tent at 4:00 A.M. and made one last dash southward, leaving the sledge behind. Half-running, half-walking, they covered eighteen and one-half miles, until they reached latitude eighty-eight degrees, twenty-three minutes south. There Shackleton hoisted Queen Alexandra's flag and claimed the South Polar Plateau in the name of King Edward VII. Doctor Marshall took pictures of "The Boss," Wild, and Adams standing by the flag, and a brass tube containing records and a special Antarctica stamp issue was planted in the snow. The try for the Pole was ended—ninety-seven miles short of the goal.

"We have shot our bolt," Shackleton wrote in his diary. "Whatever regrets may be, we have done our best."

Unsuccessful for one prize, they now began a march for even higher stakes—a race with starvation. "Throughout the historic journey, Death, on his pale horse, the blizzard, was following close," as one biographer recorded it. Rushing back to their sledge, they found that the blizzard had been a blessing in disguise. The winds had swept away the loose snow, leaving the snow compressed by their footsteps in easy-to-see blocks several inches high. And with the loose snow gone, they had a better marching surface. The first lap was won. In two days, they made it back to the last depot in the middle of the plateau.

With a fierce wind at their backs, Shackleton decided to improvise a sail from the floor cloth of the tent and mount it on the sledge. It was a good idea, and now they began to average better mileage on the daily runs. On January 14, however, another biscuit had to be deducted from their already pathetic daily ration, for it was 120 miles to the next depot at the top of Beardmore Glacier. On January 24, there was only two days' food left, with more than forty miles to go over the treacherous crevasses. From

the morning of the twenty-sixth to the evening of the twenty-seventh, they had no solid food—just tea and cocoa—and the battering they took as they descended the glacier taxed the last of their waning strength. Time and again, they were saved from death in the chasms by their harnesses and great teamwork. But for all their miseries, their spirits lifted when they sighted the depot on the twenty-eighth.

On the ice barrier, with the terrible glacier behind them, the prospects seemed brighter. The next depot was only fifty miles away, and they had enough food for six days. But their hopes were jolted again on the first day out, when another blizzard enveloped them. At the same time, they all came down with dysentery, as a result of eating tainted pony meat. Confined to their tents for almost two full days, they were again faced with a food shortage. It was particularly serious for Frank Wild, who was suffering more than the others with dysentery and could not eat the pony meat. As they started out on the morning of January 31, Shackleton slipped his biscuit ration for the day into Wild's pocket.

"What's this, Boss?" Wild asked.

"Your need is greater than mine," Shackleton told him, fending off Wild's attempts to return it.

"He would have given me another tonight," Wild wrote in his diary, "if I had allowed him. I do not suppose that anyone else in the world can thoroughly realize how much generosity and sympathy was shown by this. I do, and by God, I shall never forget it. . . ." Doctor Marshall and Adams knew nothing of the incident until Wild's diary was published several years later.

Depot C, where the pony, Grisi, had been slaughtered, was reached on February 2. When the entire party was hit by another dysentery attack on the second day out, it became evident that this horsemeat was diseased too. But the ravenous men had no choice. It was either eat the tainted meat and suffer the weakening attacks of dysentery—or starve. When the party started out, they had rations for ninety-one days. February 2 was the ninety-fourth day

of the journey, and they still had some three hundred miles to travel before reaching the base at Hut Point. When Depot B was reached on February 13, the pony meat of Chinaman was a welcome change. It tasted better, and apparently was not tainted. The men even scooped up a solid core of frozen blood at the spot where Chinaman had been butchered, and, boiling it in water, they concocted a nourishing brew that tasted very much like beef tea.

February 15 was Shackleton's thirty-fifth birthday, and as a surprise for him, the men salvaged some shreds of tobacco from their pockets and pouches, rolled it in coarse paper, and presented him with a crude, but priceless, cigarette. It was his first smoke since Christmas, and the touching gesture underscored the affection the men held for him.

When the next blizzard struck, they did not take to their tents, for there was a gale blowing, and the strong wind blowing into the sledge sail meant greater speed and less effort. For two days, they staggered through the furious snow, and when they camped on February 19, they ate the last food in the ration box. If it stormed the next day, or if they were to lose the trail to Depot A, they would be finished. It was overcast on the twentieth and visibility was bad, but they staggered onward, often on the verge of complete collapse. Miraculously, they managed to do fourteen miles without a meal, and at 4:00 P.M. they sighted the beautiful black flag of Depot A. This time they had outlegged death's galloping white stallion in a photo finish. There were smiles beneath the matted beards as the battered heroes clawed at the food with shaky hands. The Christmas delicacies—sardines, jam, and the like—which had been left behind to lighten the outward march were gobbled up. Cigarettes and tobacco were plentiful when the meal was finished.

There were just two hurdles remaining now on the road to survival. Would there be a depot at Minna Bluff, which was about three days' travel from Depot A? And could they get back to Captain Scott's old Hut Point base before

the ice in McMurdo Sound chased the *Nimrod* back to the open water? A substantial depot of rations was to have been placed at Minna Bluff by a sledge party, under the command of Ernest Joyce, some time in January, to enable Shackleton and his men to make the final run to Hut Point. There was no way of knowing if Joyce had succeeded. Similarly, the *Nimrod* was supposed to leave the Sound by March 1, if heavy ice clogged the water. The thought of getting to Hut Point and not finding the *Nimrod* was dreadful. In either case, Shackleton and his mates would be in danger of perishing. On the twenty-second, they found the tracks of a dog team party in the snow. Now they were reasonably sure the Bluff depot had been established. On the twenty-third, they spotted the flag of the depot and said a prayer of thanksgiving. Once again they had been down to their last biscuit.

That night, with a full stomach and a light heart, Shackleton wrote in his diary: "Joyce and his party have done their work well. Now we are safe as regards food, and it only remains for us to reach the ship. I climbed up on top of the depot, and shouted out to those below of the glorious feeds that awaited us. First, I rolled down three tins of biscuits, then cases containing luxuries of every description. . . . There were Carlsbad plums, eggs, cakes, plum puddings, gingerbread, and crystalized fruit, even fresh-boiled mutton from the ship. After months of want and hunger, we suddenly found ourselves able to have meals fit for the gods, and with appetites that the gods might have envied. . . ."

Still another blizzard greeted the start of their last sprint to Hut Point. Two days of substantial meals had primed them for the final drive, but on the third day, Doctor Marshall became seriously ill with dysentery again, and the day was spent in the tents. On the twenty-sixth, Marshall insisted on taking the trail and kept up with the party for twenty-four miles, but the ordeal all but finished him. Realizing that Marshall could not continue, Shackleton devised an emergency plan. Leaving Adams to care for

the ailing doctor, and taking only one day's rations on a light sledge, Shackleton and Wild embarked on a forced march to Hut Point on the twenty-seventh. Without sleep, they tramped thirty miles and reached Hut Point on the evening of the twenty-eighth. After 117 days, they were back to their starting point, but there was no time for celebration. The hut was empty, but a letter from Joyce explained that the Northern Party had successfully reached the south magnetic pole and that all the other missions had been executed with good results. That news was good, but the other news was not. Joyce stated that the *Nimrod* would be lying at nearby Glacier Tongue until February 26. It was now the twenty-eighth.

Shackleton and Wild, aching for sleep, sat up all night weighing their desperate plight. The sleeping bags had been abandoned with the sledge some miles back on the trail, when they had decided to make a final dash for Hut Point. There was no covering in the hut, and although they wrapped themselves in some old roofing felt, it was too cold to sleep. They tried to start a fire, hoping to attract the attention of the *Nimrod* if it was nearby, but they could not get anything to burn. They attempted to hoist a flag as a signal, but their fingers were so frozen they couldn't tie a knot in the rope. In the morning, they tried signaling by heliograph, and at 11:00 A.M., they received an answer. And what an answer it was! There on the sound was the *Nimrod*—the beautiful *Nimrod*.

On board within the hour, Shackleton and Wild were greeted like men back from the dead. They learned that the *Nimrod's* new skipper had given them up as lost, and that only the most energetic persuasion had induced him to keep the ship in the sound until the last possible moment. There were endless questions, but Shackleton begged off. "We'll have time for that later," he said. "Let's wait until we get Marshall and Adams on board." Worn by four months of privation and without sleep for forty-eight hours, Shackleton nevertheless insisted on leading the relief party to bring in Marshall and Adams. By 2:30 that afternoon, he

was back on the trail—scarcely more than two hours after he had boarded the *Nimrod*. He was a leader in the fullest sense of the word.

Stopping for only a short nap on the trail, the rescue party reached Marshall and Adams at 1:00 P.M. the next afternoon. Rest had improved Marshall's condition considerably, and he was able to march and share the sledge pulling. At 1:00 A.M. on March 4, the four heroes were safely aboard the *Nimrod*. They had beaten death, but it had been a race right down to the wire.

On the journey back to New Zealand, Shackleton took stock of the expedition. The South Pole expedition had missed its mark, but this surely was no disgrace. They had marched 366 miles farther than any predecessors, and the heartbreak of falling ninety-seven miles short of the prize was eased by the importance of the discoveries made along the way—Beardmore Glacier, the two mountain ranges, and the great polar plateau itself. The expedition's other parties also had been magnificent. The Northern Party, under Douglas Mawson and T. W. Edgeworth David, had attained the magnetic pole for the first time. Another group had scaled Mount Erebus, and still another had gathered important data on the character of the ice barrier. It had been, without doubt, the most successful polar expedition up to that time. And, more important to Shackleton, every man had returned safely and without serious ailment or injury.

Arriving in New Zealand on March 23, Shackleton cabled the first news of the expedition to London in a series of exclusive newspaper articles. The next day, with the London papers screaming the news of his triumphs, Shackleton was famous.

He had answered beyond any doubt the malicious gossip that had questioned his courage.

Honors came to Shackleton now from every direction. The King bestowed upon him the third class of the Royal Victorian Order, and later in the year tapped him for Knighthood. The Royal Geographical Society struck a

special gold medal for him, and other countries of the world clamored for a chance to salute him. Parliament announced that it would contribute \$100,000 to clear up most of the staggering debts Sir Ernest had incurred outfitting his Antarctic expedition. His excellent and dramatic journal contained material for a two-volume story of his adventures, and his knack for telling a story put him in great demand as a lecturer. These two projects alone should have given him a good start on the road to financial security.

Shackleton, however, for all his ability as a leader, was not able to cope with his new role of national hero. As indicated by his many unsuccessful attempts to earn a living prior to the *Nimrod* journey, he did not have a mind for business. Ever the optimist, he was a sucker for almost any get-rich-quick scheme that came his way. Figuring that his lecture tour would bring him at least \$250,000 in a short time, Sir Ernest began to spend money like a millionaire. He made large donations to relatives and favorite charities, and on numerous occasions startled his promoters by announcing he would turn over the proceeds from a lecture to a local hospital, school, or church.

Instead of having a good nest egg after a year or more of world acclaim, Shackleton wasn't much better off financially at the end of his lecture tour than he was when he started out on the *Nimrod*. For all his excellent contacts among England's business tycoons, he was always badly advised. He later wrote to a friend this self-analysis: "Except as an explorer, I am no good at anything. . ."

In the middle of 1913, four years after his return on the *Nimrod*, Shackleton heard the call of the white continent again. During this period, Admiral Robert E. Peary had attained the North Pole; Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian, and Captain Scott had reached the South Pole, although Scott and his men had perished in a blizzard on the journey home. In view of these achievements, there was little left for Shackleton to shoot at—the major goals of polar exploration had been reached. Sir Ernest, however, now dreamed of the most ambitious undertaking of all—a

transcontinental expedition that would split Antarctica in half on a line with the Pole.

Shackleton purchased two ships for the journey. The *Endurance*, named for Shackleton's family motto, left England on August 4, 1914, for the Weddell Sea, via South America. Twenty-six men were aboard, with Sir Ernest's old comrade, Frank Wild, second in command. Lieutenant Frank Worsley was sailing master. On this expedition, seventy-five Canadian sledge dogs were taken along. The other ship, the *Aurora*, which had been used by Mawson for a previous expedition, was docked in Australia. Shackleton hoped to conserve money by sailing from that point, rather than making the expensive journey from England.

En route to the Weddell Sea, the *Endurance* stopped at South Georgia, a small island belonging to Great Britain. There Shackleton learned from returning whalers that ice conditions in the south were completely unfavorable. The ship left South Georgia on December 5 and encountered pack ice three days later. By Christmas Day, it had traveled only 350 miles. But during the next four weeks they made 600 miles. On January 19, ice packed tightly around the *Endurance* and she could not budge. After ten days in the ice pack, the ship's fires were allowed to go out and the boilers were drained. Shackleton began to make plans for spending the terrible winter night in the ice.

The floe that held the *Endurance* drifted northward, away from the expedition's objectives. It had drifted ninety-five miles by March 31, 1915. The party lived aboard ship, but kept emergency supplies stacked on deck in case it became necessary to abandon ship in a hurry. To pass the time away, the men held dog and sledge races across the ice, or hunted for penguins and seals to replenish their rations. On July 24, there appeared to be heavy pressure in the pack, not far from the ship. Shackleton wrote in his journal. "Our long months of rest and safety seemed to be at an end and a period of stress had begun."

On October 27, the end came. Shackleton described it in his journal that night: "She is crushed after drifting more

than 570 miles in a northwesterly direction during the 281 days since she became locked in the ice. The distance from the point where she became beset to the place where she now rests mortally hurt in the grip of the floes is 573 miles, but the total drift through all observed positions has been 1,186 miles, and probably we actually covered more than 1,500 miles. We are now 346 miles from Paulet Island, the nearest point where there is any possibility of finding food and shelter. . . The distance to the nearest barrier west of us is about 180 miles, but a party going there would still be about 360 miles from Paulet Island and there would be no means of sustaining life on the barrier. We could not take from here food enough for the whole journey, the weight would be too great. . .”

No matter which way they traveled over the ice pack, they would have to haul small boats with them on the sledges, for they were sure to encounter open water eventually. Before heading for Paulet Island, everything that could be spared was left behind, to ease the gigantic hauling problem. The party consisted of twenty-eight men and forty-nine dogs. The *James Caird*, a twenty-two-foot whale-boat, and the *Docker* and the *Wills*, two smaller boats, were tied on sledges. The party started out on December 23, and after seven days of strenuous sledding they had advanced only seven and a half miles in a straight line. At that pace, it would require more than three hundred days to reach Paulet Island—and there was only enough food, if they ate sparingly, for forty-two days. Shackleton decided to camp and plot the direction of the floe before making another move. Thus “Patience Camp,” aptly named, was set up, and they sat back and waited. They were to remain in that spot for three and a half months.

On April 9, after a large crack appeared under Patience Camp, the three boats were launched. Shackleton, Wild, and eleven men sailed in the *Caird*. Commander Worsley and nine men were in the *Docker*, and the remaining six crewmen were in the *Wills*. Immediately, they were hampered by floating ice, but reasonably good progress was

made before they camped for the night on a sizable floe.

In the days that followed, the lack of drinking water and frostbite added to their troubles. Because of their extreme thirst, most of the men couldn't eat, and they became weaker and weaker as the journey progressed. But the entire party and the three battered boats managed to survive. On April 15 they landed safely on Elephant Island, after a one hundred-mile voyage.

The nearest civilization was the Falkland Islands, 540 miles to the north, but violent storms raged over that area at this time of the year. Shackleton knew the *Caird* would never get through. The only other choice was South Georgia, eight hundred miles to the northeast. To reach this island, Shackleton planned to raise sail and ride with the westerly hurricanes of the season. It was a desperate gamble, but it had to be taken.

The *Caird* was reinforced for the perilous trip by the ship's carpenter. Box covers and canvas were used to make a forward cabin for sleeping and cooking, for the whaleboat had no deck. The mast and sail of the *Wills* were cut down for a mizzenmast and sail to supplement the *Caird's* lug-sail and jib. And her freeboard was raised about fifteen inches using the boards of the two smaller boats.

Shackleton's plan was to take a hand-picked crew of five men with him in the *Caird* to bring back relief from South Georgia, for it was impossible to take the entire party in the whaleboat. He placed Wild in command of the twenty-two men who were to remain on Elephant Island, and before he left, he had the men build a strong hut. Piling up rocks for the side walls and using the leftover timbers from the *Wills* and the *Docker* for the roof, they erected an adequate shelter. They had rations for a few weeks of short fare, but seals and penguins in the area would supplement their food supply.

Shackleton, with Worsley, Crean, McCarty, Vincent, and McNish as his select crew, set sail for South Georgia on April 24, on a voyage that was to go down as one of the most heroic in the history of the sea. For sixteen days,

the plucky *Caird* ran against hurricanes, ice spray, and gigantic waves. During the entire voyage, Shackleton and his men were wet and cold. Everything on the *Caird*, including the sleeping bags, was soaked, and the sea even seeped into the drinking water. The wet, frozen clothing caused sores to develop on their bodies, and the sea rubbed salt into the painful wounds. The only sleep they had was in short catnaps on the rock ballast in the bottom of the boat. The boat was in constant danger of foundering as ice collected on the deck, sides, and sail in great masses. The men chipped at it with axes, working in four-minute shifts; this was the longest stint they could endure. But it was a losing battle, for the ice formed again as fast as they cleared it away. "A thousand times it appeared as though the *James Caird* must be engulfed, but the boat lived," Shackleton wrote.

On May 8, the fourteenth day at sea, they sighted the black cliffs of South Georgia. Four hours later, a fierce hurricane swept across the island and threatened to run them on the rocks. On the morning of May 10, the amazing *Caird* and its heroic crew landed on the South Georgia beach. Leaving three men on the beach—two ailing crewmen and one to care for them—Shackleton, Worsley, and Crean set out for the whaling station at Husvik. They climbed slippery mountain peaks that ranged upward of twenty-five hundred feet; negotiated steep glaciers; and finally hurdled the last obstacle by lowering themselves on a rope through a waterfall. Thirty-six hours later they marched into Husvik.

The citizens of Husvik were frightened, at first, by the wild, bedraggled appearance of the men, but as soon as Shackleton identified himself and his comrades and explained their plight, the people were eager to help. A boat was launched immediately to pick up the three crewmen on the other side of the island, and, as soon as possible, a ship was dispatched to rescue Wild and his party on Elephant Island.

Shackleton's transcontinental expedition was a complete

failure, and yet the glorious deeds that were accomplished in their epic struggle for survival stand out in history as some of the inspiring chapters of world exploration.

In 1920, hopeful of attaining one more successful goal before he was too old for exploration, Shackleton came up with a plan that called for the study of all oceanic and sub-Antarctic islands and two thousand miles of Antarctic coastline. It was to be the most scientific of his expeditions. An old classmate at Dulwich College, John Q. Rowett, who had prospered in business, offered to finance the undertaking. On September 24, 1921, the *Quest*, a small sealer purchased in Norway, sailed from England for Antarctica. With Shackleton were his old shipmates, Wild and Worsley, and several others. Sir Ernest beamed as he looked forward to another challenge in the frozen south. On January 4, 1922, the *Quest* reached South Georgia, and Shackleton went ashore to greet old friends who had helped him during the rescue operations of the *Endurance* crew. He returned to the ship that night, chatted cheerfully with his mates, and then went to his bunk. Before turning in he wrote one line in his journal: "In the darkening twilight I saw a lone star hover gem-like above the bay. . ."

At 3:30 A.M., on January 5, 1922, Sir Ernest Shackleton suffered a heart attack and died in his sleep. He was only forty-eight years old when the end came, but few men in history have packed as much excitement and achievement into so short a lifetime. And, as the tearful Wild and Worsley acknowledged, "The Boss" had died happy—in the field, with his boots on, spoiling for another battle in what he called his white warfare of the south. His comrades buried Sir Ernest on the tip of South Georgia, at the gateway to Antarctica. In a labor of love they carried great stones to his grave and built a cairn, topped by a cross and cemented into solid rock. Explorers who have sailed past the memorial en route to another duel with the terrible tempered Antarctic swear they have heard a voice crying out through the stiff gales:

"Go get her, mate."



The Death of Floyd Collins

Sightseers from over thirty states picnicked on his sandstone tomb as vendors hawked hot dogs, soda, and balloons. And while the whole state argued about how to save him, Floyd died.

BOOTON HERNDON

For the heart that's true and brave, no place in the whole world offers more opportunities for adventure than does the limestone region of Kentucky. Here, eons ago, when this area was the floor of a great ocean, these beds of limestone were laid down, then hardened under pressure. As the stone condensed, it pulled away from itself, leaving crevices running both up and down and sideways. And over the ages, after the seas receded, water from rain and melting snows, slightly carbonated from the carbon dioxide in the air, seeped into those crevices, dissolved the solid stone and made them larger. Today, under thousands of square miles of the eastern United States, lie interminable mazes of crevices and caverns, caves and crawlways.

To those who dare to explore underground, beyond the last frontier, here is a paradise of adventure. Here, a century and a half ago, a hunter followed a wounded bear into a hole in the ground and found himself amidst the wonders of Mammoth Cave. Farm boys of the region, ever since, have thought nothing of crawling through damp passageways under their fathers' fields. Who knows what might lie around the next tortuous bend?

One of these boys, growing up near Cave City, Kentucky, was harder hit by the cave bug than the other kids. Caving is now an international hobby, with organized

groups, utilizing special equipment, exploring caves all over the world; but this boy was a generation ahead of his time. His name was Floyd Collins.

Once, in his teens, as he groped along a passageway by the dim light of a stick dipped in lard, his hand fell on something soft. It was an Indian mocassin, left by an earlier explorer centuries before. He was in his twenties, when, one winter's day, he saw a trapped groundhog disappear into a snow drift. Floyd dived after the animal, kicking away first snow, then dirt. The hole got larger, larger. He ran to the farmhouse and got a shovel and a lantern. The hole opened up beneath him. At the bottom was a passageway big enough to stand up in. He followed it to an underground room. The lantern threw only a short, dim light into the darkness. He hesitated. Should he go on? Should he face the unknown dangers of the darkness in a world no human eyes had ever seen before—or should he get out of there quick and go back to the world of light while he still could?

Floyd went on. Today this huge underground auditorium is known as the Valley of Decision. It is a part of the great Crystal Cave, a famous tourist attraction, filled with striking and beautiful formations in stone. But beneath the commercial routes lie mile on mile of tunnel which can be traversed only by slender men wriggling on their stomachs. There are bottomless pits and full-fledged streams and waterfalls, great caverns of indescribable beauty, and endless narrow tunnels floored with six inches of muck and slime. This the National Speleological Society describes as the largest network in the world. Hundreds of cavers, with equipment Floyd Collins never dreamed of, have explored the interminable labyrinth of this cave in onslaughts more carefully organized than military campaigns. But even today, many of the twisting tunnels through which Floyd squirmed in the dim light of a kerosene lantern remain a mystery. Sixteen years after he last saw Crystal Cave, a party of explorers came out of a twisting maze of tunnels into a large cavern which, they thought,

surely no human eyes had ever seen before. Then one of the explorers found a little pile of rusty bean cans. Floyd had not only been there; this was where he had eaten his lunch!

Even the most avid spelunkers today do not penetrate the dank bowels of the earth alone. Floyd, however, would go in by himself and stay for days. Once, far down in Crystal Cave, his lantern went out. Now, in Crystal Cave there are pits a hundred feet deep, with holes leading off into passageways in all directions, up and down. There is the Keyhole, through which you couldn't put a small suitcase. There is a crawlway which is too tight to permit you to extend your hands out in front of you. You must push with toes and fingers, your hands at your sides. Floyd got out of that black hole, but it took him two solid days and nights. And, yet, he kept going back down.

Even after the Crystal Cave was opened, as a family enterprise, to the public, Floyd kept exploring other caves in the area. He was looking for new entrances to Crystal Cave, a new cave for himself.

For that matter, he was just looking. Some men are driven by devils. They must climb mountains, they must penetrate arctic wastes and tropic jungles. Floyd Collins had to crawl on his belly in caves.

Several miles closer to Cave City was a sinkhole called Sand Cave. It might provide a more convenient entrance to the Collins Cave. In December, 1924, he moved in with a family named Estes, who lived near Sand Cave. Each morning he started out long before daylight, carrying his lantern, and he went down, all alone, into that deep black hole.

He worked down in Sand Cave, all alone, telling no one what he found there, all the month of December, all the month of January. One evening, the last week in January, he strolled over to his own house and had a long talk with his stepmother. He was worried. For the first time in his life, he'd had a nightmare, and it had obviously grown out of the unknown blackness of the cave. He dreamed he was

pinioned, held tight, unable to move, while black things clawed at his back. He shuddered as he told Mrs. Collins about it.

"Don't go down there any more, Floyd," Mrs. Collins said. "You've spent half your life in those caves. You've used up your time."

Floyd looked at her levelly. "I think you're right," he said. "But I haven't got much more to do now. I'll finish up Sand Cave, and then I'll quit."

At breakfast on the morning of January 30, 1925, a Friday, Floyd told the Estes family he had only about four more hours of work down in the cave. He finished his coffee, pushed back his chair, and started out on the well-traveled path through the snow-covered fields. Probably because of the snow, he wore high-laced boots this morning—he preferred soft-soled, heelless moccasins.

A steep-sided ravine, which had been created by a cavern cave-in ages before, led into a sandstone cliff. At the base of the cliff was Sand Cave. Without hesitating, Floyd dropped down into it. Today he was going to work the horizontal passage at the very bottom of the cave, sixty feet down. He crawled on back into it. What he found there nobody knows. But on his way back, somehow he crawled past the passageway leading up to the top, and kept going along the horizontal tunnel, away from the exit. The sides and top and bottom squeezed in—at one point it was only eight inches deep—but he squirmed through.

Although Floyd did not know it, this was actually the end of the tunnel. Long before, the limestone had given way at this point, and had collapsed into a jumble of huge boulders. Floyd was now crawling through crevices between these boulders.

Was he lost? If so, how did he get lost? The rumor persists to this day that Floyd was drunk down there that morning. People who knew him well, however, say that this was most unlikely. Like most of the people in the region, he loved good bourbon whisky made with rich lime-

stone water. But he had more sense than to go underground drunk. Collins was an accomplished, highly-skilled caver.

He came to a pit like the inside of a barrel, and got down in it. Feeling with his feet, he found an opening at the bottom, and squirmed into it, feet first. Further, further, he went. He put his hands by his sides, palms out, supporting himself. Now his whole body was in the crevice, just his head sticking out in the barrel-sized opening. He extended his left foot, reaching, groping. It touched something. A pebble dropped, another, then a rush of gravel and dirt. He pushed hard, trying to get out, quick, and a boulder dropped on his foot, that foot encased in the high-laced boot. He jerked, and then the whole hillside let go.

Floyd Collins was encased with rubble. He tried to move his feet; both were held securely. His arms were pinned at his sides; he couldn't move a finger. He hunched his shoulders. Instantly pebbles and dirt fell on his face. He froze. He was trapped.

Would anybody come after him? Not for a long, long time. It was only about ten o'clock Friday morning. He wasn't expected back until nightfall, if then. Everybody knew he would go off for hours, sometimes even days. He lay there. The stuff that pinioned him was wet. There was water beneath him, trickling down from the melting snow above. He was already wet from crawling in the cave; now, motionless, the cold began to eat into him. In the stillness he became aware of water dripping. Now a drop fell on his ear, now a drop on his nose. Two drops fell with a *splat*, *splat* on the dirt beside him. Now drip, now drop, now *split*, *splat*, *split*.

Then came the crickets, those blind and chirpless creatures which live in some mysterious way far below the surface of the ground. One crawled over his face. Floyd batted his eyes and it scurried away. It would be back. A drop of water hit his nose. Another one landed on his ear. *Split*, *splat*, *split*. The cricket crawled back over his face. He was instantly still. The boulder ground into his foot.

Drip, drop, drip. *Split*, *splat*, *split*. Cold. Numb. Scurry,

scurry, went the beetles. Drip, drop, drip. *Split, splat, split.* The light went out.

And Floyd Collins screamed.

How do you measure time? By the agony of pain? By shivers of cold? By the numbness of paralyzed imprisonment? By the pangs of hunger? The cravings of thirst? Look at your watch now, you who are reading this. You are Floyd Collins, entombed in a lightless cave. It will be twenty-four hours before you hear the sound of a human voice. Can you face it?

At the Estes home the next morning, someone idly remarked that Floyd hadn't come in the night before.

Jewell Estes, seventeen, thought of going over 'to the cave, but it was pretty cold. He did his chores, and then, around ten o'clock, he finally moseyed on over there. There were prints in the snow where Floyd had gone in; none where he had come out. Jewell sighed and started crawling down, every now and then pausing to shout.

At the bottom, Floyd Collins heard the voice. He didn't answer, for he had been hearing voices off and on for a period of time that could have been minutes, hours, or days. At first he had answered them, screaming into the darkness. Sometimes it was his own screams he heard, coming out of delirium. He didn't know how many times he had passed out, or for how long.

The boy was only a few feet away, unable to get through the squeeze, before his voice broke through the wall of incoherent babbling and brought Floyd to his senses. "I'm stuck down here!" he screamed. "Go get somebody. Get my brothers! Get Johnny Gerald! I'm stuck down here!"

Jewell squirmed back out of the cave and ran to get Homer and Marshall Collins, Floyd's brothers. Then he went for Johnny Gerald, Homer's friend since boyhood.

But this took time. Alone in the cave again, Floyd began to doubt if that had been a real voice he had heard. He waited, holding his breath and listening . . . Drip, drip, he heard. *Split, splat . . .*

When Homer finally came, he found a sobbing and

screaming maniac at the bottom of the pit. Homer squeezed down with him and fed him pieces of sandwich and coffee. He tried to move rocks and dirt out from around his brother's body, but there was nowhere to put them. He hurried back up to the surface for help, for organization, and for something to put over his brother's head. Then he squirmed back down again, with a handful of gunny sacks.

Around the countryside, different people took the news in different ways. Many who had heard publicity-seeking cave owners cry wolf before shrugged their shoulders and went on about their business. When local correspondents for the Louisville papers half-heartedly called in the news, the state editors paid little attention.

Only a very few men, like Homer and Johnny Gerald, were small enough and had guts enough to get through the squeeze to Floyd. And they could stay down in the humid depths only a few minutes at a time. They picked out pebbles and passed them back. A few more men, that Saturday, went down to try to make the passageway bigger. They laid on their bellies, faces against wet jagged stones, chipping tiny flakes from limestone walls with chisel and hammer.

It was Saturday night in Kentucky. The local people figured they might as well drop by the hole and take a look. They built bonfires, and more snow melted to trickle down on the anguished man beneath. They brought their jugs of bourbon whisky along, and when what few volunteer workers there were came up, wet and numbed, the loungers pressed liquor upon them. Before long, nearly everybody was drunk. Lee Collins, Floyd's father and a teetotaler, cursed them. Homer and Marshall tried to stamp out their bonfires. There was no organization, and the brothers and Johnny Gerald couldn't do it all.

From time to time, as liquor began to talk, someone would volunteer to go down and take Floyd some coffee or something to eat. Many came back to say they had talked with Floyd and had helped with the extrication work. They would show empty hands as proof that he had eaten or

drunk whatever they had taken him. But later, food and bottles were found stuck away in crevices all over the cave, mute evidence that the big talkers hadn't really gotten near Floyd. They had crouched cowering in the passageways, keeping others from working.

Other men came back up swearing there was no one down there, and stayed to jeer at those who wanted to help.

Someone took a small crowbar down to Floyd, but he couldn't use it. He went into a stupor. Sometimes he heard voices when he was all alone; sometimes he would not recognize his own brothers or Johnny Gerald. On Sunday, Homer finally realized that they might not get his brother out of there. He offered \$500 to any surgeon who would crawl down and amputate Floyd's leg.

The sight of the haggard faces of the brothers, their fingers oozing blood where the skin had worn away on the cold stone below, convinced many of the skeptics. The local correspondents finally got through to the Louisville papers. Governor W. J. Fields asked railway and mining engineers to go to the scene. There were several score of men at the scene now, drinking, talking, and making suggestions. Sometimes a bucket of dirt and rocks would be hoisted to the surface. At other times work would halt entirely, as some wild-eyed scheme was discussed. There were as many conferences held as buckets of earth removed.

There was no shortage of suggestions. Take in a grease gun to lubricate the pinioned foot. Take in a railroad jack. A flattened hook. How about making a harness, putting it on him, and dragging him out? The harness was fashioned, the operation planned. Robert Burdon, a Louisville fireman, went down with the harness, accompanied by Homer and two other men. Homer fastened the harness. Lying on their stomachs in the narrow passageway, the four men pulled. Floyd moved five inches.

"Pull again, fellas," Burdon cried.

Again they counted, then tugged. Floyd felt himself move, then a flame of agony struck his imprisoned foot.

He shrieked with pain. "Don't, don't!" he cried. "I can't stand it!"

Silence, then a hasty consultation in the gloom. "Hell, it's the *only* way!" Burdon cried. Again the count, again the heave. Floyd felt nothing; Homer was pulling against the others to save him pain.

The men gave up and started backing out. As from a distance, Floyd heard them go. "Come back," he cried. "Don't leave me here, fellas! Don't mind what I say! Get me out of here if you have to pull my foot off!"

But the men kept going, and that scheme wasn't tried again.

At dawn on Monday, a young redheaded reporter named William Burke Miller arrived at Sand Cave. The serious workers had all reached the point of collapse. And there was no one below.

Miller asked a trio of men at the entrance what was going on. They gestured at the hole and told him to go down and find out for himself.

Miller had never been in a cave before. But he was small and slight, and though he was scared to death, he started down. Working his way along the passageway, he came to a pit, slipped, and fell in. He landed on something covered with muck and slime. It moved and groaned. He had found Floyd Collins.

Floyd was delirious, incoherent. Nobody had been near him for hours. Miller talked with him and convinced him that he had not been deserted. Then he went back up to start proving it.

A portable generator had been brought in. With a light bulb burning at the end of a long wire and some hot soup, Miller went down again, the bright light revealing all the food and drink that Floyd had never received. Miller rested the light bulb on some burlap on Floyd's chest, to furnish light and warmth. He fed him the soup. Floyd's eyes cleared, and he took on new hope.

Topside, a systematic plan was worked out. With a tiny crowbar, Miller went head first into the crevice, lying on

top of Collins, prying loose the small stones that surrounded him. With every motion he made, Floyd groaned beneath him. And with every motion he made, fear struck into Miller's heart, for with the release of the tiniest pebble, the whole thing might come down on both of them.

Late Monday, the rock had been removed as far down as Floyd's shins. Now Collins could move his own hands, and help extricate the dirt. But the boulder still pinned his foot.

"I'm aching all over," Floyd told Miller, "but my head is clearer now than at any time since I've been here. A little drop of whisky sure would help."

Miller took it in to him. Miller was dreading now every trip he made. But he read Floyd some of the telegrams that were beginning to arrive from all over the country—including wires from girls who said they would crawl down and marry him—and Collins even gave a little chuckle. He dreamed that night of angels and featherbeds and chicken sandwiches.

An automobile jack was cut down, and Miller took it down. Squeezing in on top of Floyd, he got it under the boulder. He moved the handle. The boulder quivered, but the jack slipped out. Again, and again, and again, until Miller was too exhausted to move. When he got to the surface, he collapsed.

Dr. W. H. Hazlett, a surgeon from St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago, was flown to the scene to amputate Collins' leg. He couldn't get through the passageway and, at the description of the crevice, said an amputation was impossible anyway. But things were looking good. All they had to do now was move that boulder.

Wednesday morning, all alone down in the pit, Floyd heard first the sound of dirt falling, then suddenly, the terrifying rumble of a breakdown in the passageway.

An hour passed. From the passageway came the muffled sounds of steel on stone. They were digging through the breakdown. Then finally, he heard the voice of Johnny

Geralds. It came from seven feet away, but muffled. There was another breakdown then.

"Are you all right, Floyd?"

"Yes, but for God's sake, hurry up."

"There's this little breakdown here, Floyd," Johnny said. "But we'll get through all right."

"That's all you have to do," Floyd said. He had an inspiration, "'Cause now I got my foot loose."

Johnny didn't say anything. He had a good idea that Floyd was simply saying this in an effort to make them work harder. But, hell, they were going to work hard anyway.

"I'm all covered with dirt," Floyd said. Then his voice broke. "Get me out of here, Johnny," he screamed. "We were boys together, Johnny. You gotta get me outta here."

"Yeah, sure," Johnny said. "Sure, Floyd."

Collins pulled himself together. "Go on home and go to bed now, Johnny," he said, and Johnny backed out.

On top, now, there was more hysteria than there was below. Thousands of people were milling around the scene. Some of the local people said that the breakdown proved what they had suspected all along. Collins had a secret back way to that cave, they said, and he was simply backing out of it at night.

"Floyd ain't never missed a night in a warm bed since this whole thing started," one local man insisted.

From there rumors went everywhere, and some newspapers printed them all.

Tom Kilian, of the *Chicago Tribune*, gave particular credence to the rumors, and someone tossed a note into his room threatening him with death.

There were a hundred other reporters on the scene, spending \$15,000 a day on telegraph tolls alone. Many papers maintained direct-wire telephones at fifty dollars a day plus charges. It was worth it; the New York papers were printing one hundred thousand extra copies a day, each. There were photographers everywhere, many of them with planes standing by to fly their film back to their papers.

A pilot hired by one paper was the victim of a switch and delivered blank film. His name was Charles A. Lindbergh.

Governor Fields sent his lieutenant-governor, General H. H. Denhart, to the scene to take personal command of the situation. The National Guard was called out. Technical experts, engineers, and professors were sent to the scene. These men heard the rumors and were caught up in the confusion. They didn't know what to believe. They saw exhausted men crawl up to the surface and collapse.

The breakdown brought more rumors. The first breakdown was cleared, and the walls were shored up. Then there was another breakdown.

"There ain't enough money in the world to get me down in that there hole," some men were saying.

"This whole damn hill is liable to give way," others said.

General Denhart had consultations with the imported experts. He played it safe. He issued orders that no one was to go down into the hole. No one. They would sink a shaft down through the hillside; that's what they would do.

How about someone going down and telling Floyd they hadn't given up on him? The answer was no.

The local people, the ones who knew what there was to be known about caves in 1925, resented bitterly the outsiders taking over. Johnny Gerald said so, repeatedly and angrily, and was placed under technical arrest.

Homer, with food and drink for his brother, made two separate attempts to break past the soldiers at the entrance. He was banned from the scene. There were ugly mutterings; Department of Justice men mingled with the crowd, and extra ammunition was passed out to the sentries.

Meanwhile, the experts with their slide rules were all plotting where they would start the shaft. In not much more time than it would take to clear the breakdown, the experts finally came to an agreement. The shaft would begin a few feet in front of the cave, go straight down, and intercept the passageway—or what was thought to be a passageway—on the other side of Collins. There they would remove the boulder and bring him up. Dr. Hazlett had

adrenalin ready, with which to revive him. It all seemed fine. The reporters wrote that order was coming out of chaos.

H. T. Carmichael, superintendent of a nearby asphalt mine, was placed in charge of the workings. Volunteers started shoveling out the dirt. It went well for five feet; then they struck hard rock. Carmichael gave the order to blast. Blast! But what about that man down there in the rubble?

"It's the only thing we can do," Carmichael said. "If we don't hurry, he'll die anyway."

As the local people looked on in helpless fury from the edge of the ravine, the dynamite was detonated. Sixty feet beneath, more dirt poured on the face of Floyd Collins.

The next day, Friday, the shaft was down to fifteen feet.

More troops came in to watch the sullen mountaineers. Homer again broke through the lines and went down into the cave. He came back swearing that the passageway was safe. He was hustled out quickly.

A seventy-five-foot tube was lowered into the cave, and hot air was pumped in. They thought this might warm Floyd. It was suggested that the vapor of rich soup be pumped down to nourish him through some kind of osmosis. A famous hound dog of the region, Joe Wheeler by name, was sent down into the cave with a canteen of water around his neck. Banana oil was pumped down into the cave, and a professor went to Mammoth Cave and walked around sniffing. The idea, of course, was to find a new entrance to the cave.

The walls of the shaft kept tumbling in. Heavy timbers were brought in and put in place. Progress that day: three feet.

A diamond drill was rigged up to precede the shaft. On Saturday, one week after Floyd was first discovered, eight days after he was trapped, four days after he had last eaten or drunk, the drill was down to fifty-three feet. It penetrated the ceiling to a cavern, it was thought. A group of experts bound together with a rope went down into the

cave with barometers, sensitive microphones, and other equipment. All work stopped. A half-hour after they disappeared, the drill ran for two minutes. It was silent for five, then ran for two more. The men came back up out of the cave, and a big discussion was held. It was decided that the drill and shaft were headed in just exactly the right direction. The shaft was twenty-three feet down.

A barbed-wire fence was put up along the edge of the ravine to hold the crowds back. Contributions were pouring in, but not enough to keep the field kitchen in food. Meal tickets were distributed to those actually working and the free-loaders sadly went away.

On Sunday, the countryside went wild. There were cars from everywhere. At least ten thousand people milled around the scene. The Louisville and Nashville had to put on extra coaches to Cave City. There were hucksters peddling apples, soda pop, sandwiches. A hamburger cost a quarter. It cost three dollars to get from Cave City in a jitney, and a seventy-five-cent room cost two dollars. The bootleggers had been run away, or at least driven underground, by the National Guardsmen, but there was a medicine man openly peddling his wares by a covered wagon. The stuff he sold was more potent than any moonshine.

Religious services were held on the scene. A revival preacher was converting sinners by the score. Business was so good that a rival preacher rode in on muleback from the country church twenty miles away.

The shaft hit solid rock at noon at a depth of twenty-six feet. Floyd had had no food, no fluid, for four and a half days; he had been pinioned for nine. The people were angry. General Denhart made a round trip to the state capital, driving all night, to see the governor. On Monday morning, General Denhart called a full military court of inquiry, by authority of the governor, to investigate rumors. Many of the miners working in the shaft got mad and went home.

Down below, what sanity there was left in that tortured

wreck of a man must have suffered a blow when the light went out. Someone up above had connected an amplifier and earphones to the wires, cut off the juice, and listened. Floyd stirred and cried out in his misery.

"He's alive!" the man in earphones cried out above. Dr. Hazlett took over and reported that Collins was breathing from eighteen to twenty-one breaths per minute.

The shaft got down to thirty-eight feet.

Tuesday night, the workers at the bottom of the shaft smelled banana oil. Dr. Hazlett was awakened at 11:00 P.M. and rushed to the scene. Collins was breathing at the rate of fourteen breaths per minute.

On Wednesday the shaft was down to forty-four feet, with at least ten hours to go. They were still working in boulders and muck. Sounds still came from Floyd in the cave.

On Thursday the diamond drill went to sixty feet. The shaft reached fifty-three. "Any time now!" Carmichael promised. Each member of the three-man crew at the bottom was strapped in a harness with ropes running up to the top of the shaft, lest they suddenly break through into a cavern. General Denhart was still conducting his court in Cave City.

Down below in the pit; the light burned out. Now Floyd Collins had nothing.

On Friday the thirteenth, the shaft was down to fifty-five feet. Edwin Brennen, a miner from Cincinnati, crawled down into Sand Cave and tapped on the wall as the men in the shaft listened. In the silence, suddenly, Brennen heard a muffled gasp. Collins was still alive!

On Saturday, the walls caved in again. Now they decided to tunnel laterally from the shaft. Brennen went down into the cave, and now Carmichael himself was lowered into the shaft. He and Brennen held a conversation. They could hear each other distinctly. And an arrowhead was found at the bottom of the shaft.

General Denhart announced the finding of the military

court: It was all the fault of Tom Kilian, the Chicago *Tribune* man.

Sunday, after an early morning thunderstorm, was sunny and crisp. License plates from thirty states were counted. Hot-dog and soda-pop stands were turning away customers. Apples were selling for fifteen cents. Balloon men were making a fortune. Giggling high school girls were pursued by shouting boys. The happy cries of the teenagers took some of the sting off the bitter curses of the motorists stuck hub-deep in the road. Carmichael said his men were working with velvet fingers, and Collins would soon be found.

On Monday morning the experts permitted only one man at a time to go into the lateral opening at the bottom of the shaft. A miner named Albert Marshall, wearing a rubber coat and carrying a chisel and hammer, was lowered to the bottom of the shaft, and he crawled into the opening. He sent word that things were going fine, and General Denhart called the guard out, just in case. Marshall was chipping away when suddenly the chisel leaped forward. A burst of stale air blew into his face.

He enlarged the hole, then stuck in his head. He heard the monotonous drip of water. He looked down and saw bottles, tools, and rope. After nine days, they were right back in the same place.

Carmichael came down with Brennen and a bright light. They lowered Brennen head first into the hole. He shone the light around. At his feet a dirt-covered object lay in the mud. He fell to his knees beside it.

Floyd Collins was cold and stiff and dead. The covering had fallen off his head. A red indentation had been worn in his cheek by the drip, drip, drip of the water. It's quite possible that he had been driven utterly mad long before he died.

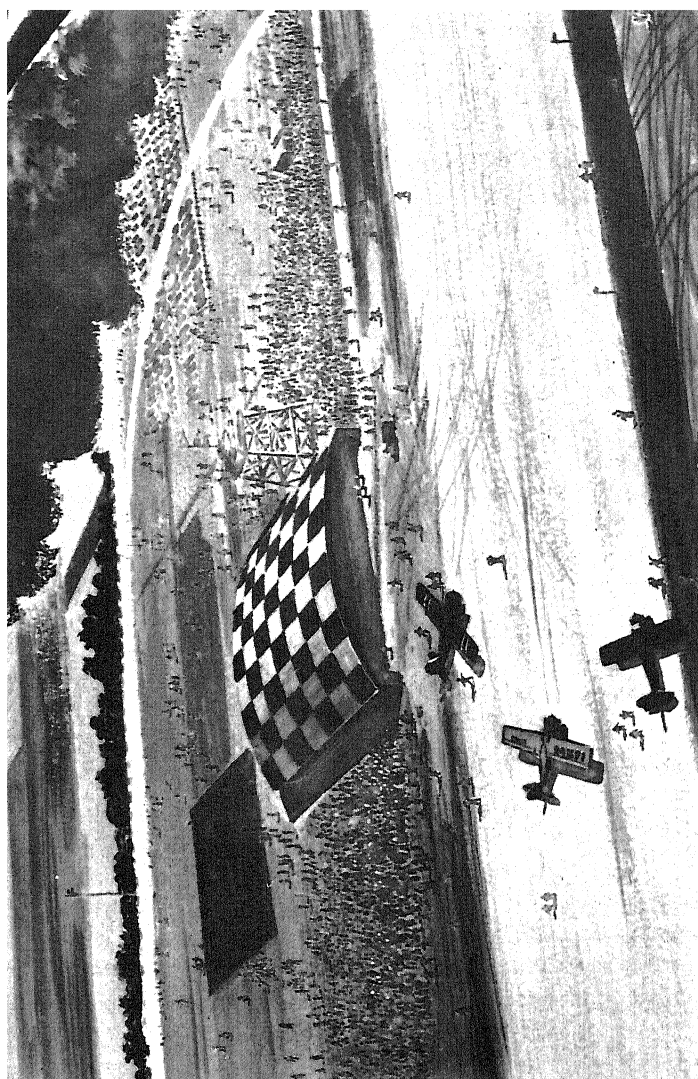
This was the end of Floyd Collins, but it was not the end of the story. The officials quickly declared the shaft too dangerous and blasted boulders off the hillsides to fill it. Homer raised money by doing a series of tasteless personal

appearances, and hired experienced local miners to go down and get his brother's body.

They did, and they also got the boulder that had pinned his foot. It weighed fifty-five pounds.

As for the passageway that was declared unsafe when Floyd Collins was alive and sane, it is still there.

Ask the cavers. They'll tell you. Floyd Collins could have been brought up out of that cave alive.



\$35,000 Race to Death

Of the fifteen planes that made a bid for glory in the Dole Flight across the Pacific, only two finished in the running—the other thirteen made tragic aviation history.

JANE CONANT

In the summer of 1927, a brave but tragic chapter was written in the history of aviation—a chapter that directly concerns the skilled men who take today's Stratocruisers and Super-Constellations across the seas. The skipper of a DC-6B on the San Francisco-Honolulu run carries on a heritage handed him by twenty-seven young fliers. They were the Dole racers, contestants in history's first trans-oceanic aerial competition. Their legacy to today's Pacific pilots grew out of a single concept and an adventurous dream: Charles Lindbergh had just flown across the Atlantic from New York to Paris; no one had ever flown the Pacific; someone had to do it first.

That was what the twenty-seven had in mind when they signed up for the Dole Flight, competing for \$35,000 in prizes offered by James D. Dole, the Hawaii pineapple king, to the first planes that could span the twenty-four hundred miles between California and Honolulu. They wanted to get there, and they all wanted to be the first.

But it wasn't as simple as it sounded. Almost everything went wrong. The story of the Dole Flight turned out to be one of irony and misadventure, courage and folly, valiant imprudence—and death. It was jinxed from the start; it couldn't even begin on time. The official race date was originally August 12, 1927, at Oakland Airport, a dusty field on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay. But because of

weather and other troubles, the starter's flag didn't flick down until the following Tuesday, August 16.

Fifteen planes were formally entered. Three crashed before the race began, and two more on the bumpy runway on the starting day. Two were withdrawn; one was disqualified; and one couldn't even make it to Oakland. Two managed to take off, but were hardly past the Golden Gate when mechanical trouble forced them to return. Four actually got away. Only two, of all the fifteen, made it to Hawaii. And in all this, ten of the fliers paid dearly for pursuing their dream. They paid with their lives.

The dream began with Lindbergh. A few days after he landed in Paris on May 21, 1927, Dole posted the Pacific prize money: \$25,000 for the first plane to fly to Hawaii, and \$10,000 for the second. They were big rewards, and there were many would-be takers. There were so many that Dole, who originally had thought of single flights like Lindbergh's, agreed it should be made into a race. The August 12 date was set. It was specified that anyone starting earlier would be ineligible for the prize money.

At first, San Francisco tried her best to be the starting place, but lost out to Oakland, the little sister city across the bay. Other communities saw the opportunities too, and worked to produce municipal entries that would bring them the same sort of fame Lindbergh's flight gave to St. Louis. *Dallas Spirit* was entered, and *City of Peoria*. *Pride of Los Angeles* and *Angel of Los Angeles* gave southern California's metropolis two ships on which to pin its hopes. There were *Oklahoma*, and the Honolulu entry, *Aloha*. The others were *Woolaroc*, *Golden Eagle*, *Pabco Flyer*, *Miss Hollydale*, *El Encanto*, *Bluebird*, *Miss Doran*, and two without names. There were monoplanes, biplanes, and one with three wings. They were small and brightly-colored, and when some of them took off, mechanics had to run along holding the wing struts to keep them steady.

Some of the fliers were intent and thoughtful, some dashing and careless. Hardly any were well prepared; none were afraid.

Golden Eagle and her pilot, Jack Frost, set a keynote of jaunty daring. She was a handsome little Lockheed ship of advanced design with a streamlined metal fuselage. She was painted gold, sponsored by the San Francisco *Examiner*, and could fly 131 miles an hour. They gave her the license number NX-913, and asked Frost whether he minded. He was a twenty-nine-year-old bachelor, born in Chicago, a World War I flying instructor who got to the front too late for the fighting. He was in the New York bond business. "Heck, no," he told the superstitious questioner. "What's one more thirteen in my life?"

Art Goebel, pilot of *Woolaroc*, had a thirteen of his own. He was another bachelor, thirty-one years old, big, good-looking, tanned, and smiling. New Mexico-born, he was a World War I army flier and then became a Hollywood stunt man. Goebel belonged to the "Thirteen Black Cats of Hollywood," who defied not only the number's hex, but the laws of balance and gravity by providing aerial thrills for the moviegoers of the '20's. They set up one of the strangest fee schedules known to movieland, ranging from eighty dollars for a simple parachute jump to fifteen hundred dollars for the grand-slam item: "Blowing ship up in mid-air, pilot leaving with parachute."

Another thirteen was for what the newspapers called the "mystery monoplane" of Navy Lieutenants George D. Covell and R. S. Waggener of San Diego. Their ship, unnamed, was No. 13 in the drawing of lots for starting positions. Jack Frost's *Golden Eagle* was christened on August 13. At one point in the pre-race turmoil, there were thirteen planes on the list of contestants.

None of this bothered the fliers. Auggy Pedlar, for instance, was a skinny and hot-tempered fellow with prominent ears, a pleasing grin, and a battered straw hat covering sandy hair that was thinning though he was only twenty-four. He didn't worry about thirteens. Pedlar, of Lincoln, Nebraska, was a test pilot for Standard Aircraft Corporation of Lincoln. He won the toss of a coin to become the pilot of the little Buhl Air Sedan biplane, *Miss Doran*. This

was a fragile ship with a cloth-covered fuselage, painted red, white, and blue, and measuring twenty-six feet from nose to tail. She could do ninety miles an hour, loaded; her gas tanks carried four hundred gallons, and she had a 220 hp Wright engine.

Pedlar's navigator was Lieutenant Vilas R. Knope, thirty, of San Diego, an Annapolis man with a wife and five-year-old daughter. The passenger was Miss Doran herself—Mildred Doran, twenty-two, a pretty girl with hazel eyes, olive skin, and dark curly hair. She was a Michigan State College graduate and had been teaching the fifth grade in Caro, Michigan, until she caught the Dole fever. If there was a star of the Dole show, it was Mildred. She weighed 108 pounds, and wore five fraternity pins on her olive-drab flying suit. She said the boys who gave them to her were just dancing partners, just friends. She wasn't in love with anybody—no, not with Auggy Pedlar either, though the feature writers of the time tried their best to make it a romance. One writer said Mildred was in love with danger.

Mildred and the other contestants were copiously quoted in the newspapers as preparations for the race moved forward. Afterward, some of the things they said were looked back on as prophetic; others, nervy but unpunished challenges to Fate. Martin Jensen was one whose words disturbed the superstitious. He was twenty-six, a peppery little Honolulu commercial flier and an eleventh-hour Dole entry. He took delivery of *Aloha*, a lemon-yellow monoplane with a pink lei painted around her nose, at Vance Breese's San Francisco aircraft factory just eight days before the take-off. He was able to only because his wife, Margaret, managed to raise the \$15,000 purchase price in a frantic last-minute effort in Hawaii.

"God bless that darling wife of mine!" cried Jensen. Then, when they asked him whether he thought he could make it to Honolulu, he quipped; "She told me before I took the steamer for San Francisco that if I flopped into the ocean, she was going to row out and smack me over the

head with an oar. So I guess I've got to make it. I'll make it or die in the attempt."

Those who saw significance, later, in the pre-race signs and portents looked back also on a small and special group—those who were to have entered, but didn't—and wondered what might have been their lot if they had.

In Dallas, citizens joined a fund-raising campaign sponsored by the *Morning News* and *Evening Journal* to enter *Dallas Spirit*, a green and silver Travelair monoplane. Her pilot was Captain William P. Erwin, thirty-one, Oklahoma-born son of a minister, gifted musician, and World War I aerial combat victor over nine German planes. His pretty bride of less than a year, Connie, was to have gone as his navigator-passenger, but it turned out she was not yet twenty-one and thus could not qualify. In her place, twenty-seven-year-old Alvin Eichwaldt of Hayward, California, one-time navy seaman, who survived three ship explosions during the war, became "Lone Star Bill's" flying partner.

Lieutenant William J. Slattery was to have gone as navigator for Jensen in *Aloha*, but last-minute navy orders kept him home. Instead, Jensen took Captain Paul Schluter, thirty-seven, Berlin-born master of a California coastwise merchant vessel, *City of Nome*.

Ely Slonager, a commercial flier in Lincoln, Nebraska, and chum of Pedlar and Mildred Doran, wanted to be Pedlar's co-pilot. Neither man was a navigator, however, so one had to make room for someone with navigation skills. They tossed a coin, and Slonager lost. Pedlar became the pilot, and Lieutenant Manley R. Lawing, the navigator. And here again there was a change. Lawing failed one phase of the official tests, and Lieutenant Knope was the final choice.

Then there was Navy Lieutenant Leo Pawlikowski, of San Diego, who was to have been navigator of entry No. 13, the low-wing "mystery ship." A few days before they were to have started for Oakland, Pawlikowski developed an abscess on his back and had to undergo surgery. The doctors wouldn't let him go, though he protested urgently,

and Lieutenant Covell, the pilot, took Lieutenant Waggener instead.

As the entry list began to shape up, mishaps multiplied, and troubles grew. Still the fliers were casual, jaunty, excited, and enthusiastic. They took their little ships up for test flights and sauntered back to their tent quarters around the Oakland field with an air of busy concentration, trying to ignore the spectators who clustered from dawn until dusk along the wooden fences. Every day the crowds grew bigger and the interest mounted. As the contestants arrived from Dallas, or Nebraska, or southern California, each was roundly cheered, and the merits of each ship were expertly weighed by the fence-watchers.

One setback that couldn't be shrugged off came on June 28, about a month after Dole posted the prizes.

Coolly, without fuss and with smooth efficiency, Army Lieutenants Lester J. Maitland, twenty-nine, and Albert F. Hegenberger, thirty-two, took a three-engine Fokker military monoplane off the ground at Oakland at 7:09 that morning, and safely landed at Wheeler Field, Oahu, twenty-five hours and fifty minutes later.

The first flight—the one the Dole racers wanted—was made. To Maitland and Hegenberger went the honor of conquering the Pacific by air.

The Dolebirds could console themselves because Maitland and Hegenberger were Army. No civilians had yet flown the Pacific. A Dole entry could still make that bit of history.

But that was denied them too. On July 14, a young airmail pilot named Ernie Smith and his navigator, Emory Bronte, ran their twenty-seven-foot monoplane, *City of Oakland*, down the runway, swerved in a dusty rut, staggered into the air—and crash-landed, out of gas, in a thorn tree on the island of Molokai twenty-six hours and thirty-six minutes later. It wasn't Honolulu, but it was still Hawaii. The civilian "first" was lost to the Dole fliers as well.

It had no effect whatever on their plans. They were

going anyway. Besides, Dole's rich prizes were still for them, since the rules disqualified the early starters.

The tempo began picking up. By July 26, there were five entries.

Goebel signed up with *Woolaroc*, and chose Lieutenant William V. Davis, Jr., of Annapolis and Pensacola, as his navigator. Pedlar was in with *Miss Doran*, and Major Livingston Irving of Berkeley, California, entered a Breese monoplane called *Pabco Flyer*. Frederick Alexander Giles of Detroit, a British ace of World War I, enrolled a Hess biplane called *Bluebird*, and Charles William Parkhurst of Loma, Illinois, with navigator Ralph Lowes, proposed to fly an Air King biplane, *City of Peoria*.

The rest of the enrollments soon followed—and so did the long string of mishaps and frustrations for the flimsy ships and the fliers.

Major Irving was testing *Pabco Flyer* with an attempted non-stop flight from San Francisco to San Diego, but a gasoline feed-pipe broke when he was forty miles at sea off lonely Point Sur, 150 miles south of San Francisco. As biting gas spewed back into his face, Irving gritted his teeth, headed inshore, and landed in a cow pasture. He announced he wanted to make some radical changes in his machine.

Oklahoma, a Travelair monoplane, became the second entry of the Phillips Petroleum Company of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, which already had Art Goebel's *Woolaroc* in the race. *Oklahoma's* pilot was Bennett Griffin, who had flown for the Army, and Al Henley was the navigator. They ran into trouble before they ever got to Oakland, when a broken exhaust pipe sent showers of sparks over their fabric fuselage as they headed into California from Bartlesville. They made a forced landing and were delayed by repairs.

The jinx seemed to be on for the unnamed monoplane of Lieutenant Covell too. He and Lieutenant Pawlikowski—the man later grounded by the abscess—went up for a test flight between Los Angeles and San Diego, but had to

come down at Santa Ana because of trouble with the fuel feed.

It was working on Auggy Pedlar and Mildred Doran as well. En route to Oakland with their original navigator, Lieutenant Lawing, they had spark plug trouble over California's San Joaquin Valley, and came down in a wheatfield. Auggy fixed the spark plug, but when they tried to take off, the left wheel caught in a rut and was broken.

This presented something of a problem, because they had no tools. Mildred said blithely: "We threw them off at Long Beach, because they were in the way and cluttered things up."

Jack Frost's sleek *Golden Eagle* wasn't spared. He and his navigator, Gordon Scott, twenty-six-year-old Britisher employed by Douglas Aircraft, started for Oakland from San Diego on August 6, and hit a gopher hole on the runway. Frost and Scott were unhurt, but the fast little golden ship—the torpedo-shaped NX-913—was a sorry sight when the dust settled. Her landing gear was wrecked, the tips of her steel propeller curled back, the oil and gas lines were askew, and there was a hole in her nose. The fliers ordered a new engine and began patching up the damage.

City of Peoria was having her share of grief in Lomax, Illinois. Her fliers, Parkhurst and Lowes, had to postpone trial flights because a storm of sandflies surrounded the plane and drove her mechanics to cover. In Detroit, Giles, the British war ace, was having engine trouble with his *Bluebird*.

Surprisingly enough, some were getting along fine. The triplane *Pride of Los Angeles*, one of the biggest Dole entries, was having her two engines installed in the south. Flight fans called her a "stack of wheat," for the three layers of wing. Captain J. L. Giffin, a Long Beach attorney, was the pilot; Theodore S. Lundgren, bond broker and former army flier, the navigator; and a group of southern Californians headed by actor Hoot Gibson, the sponsors.

On August 7, Navy Lieutenants Norman A. Goddard and Kenneth C. Hawkins flew in easily from San Diego in

their metal monoplane, *El Encanto*. It was an uneventful run, and took them six hours. Frank L. Clark of Los Angeles arrived safely from Santa Monica in the tiny biplane *Miss Hollydale*, whose wings were just thirty-seven feet across. His trip was five hours, fifteen minutes.

August 8 was a big day—they drew lots for starting positions.

All fifteen formal entries were in, though not all the pilots were present when the meeting opened in the office of Captain C. W. Saunders, California director of the National Aeronautics Association, in the Matson Building on San Francisco's Market Street. Fifteen envelopes, each containing a slip of paper bearing a number from one to fifteen, were heaped in a big papier-mâché wastebasket on Captain Saunders' desk.

The fliers drew, and No. 1 went to Bennett Griffin and Al Henley. That meant their plane, *Oklahoma*, would be the first to take off, and, in a field of fifteen, this meant more than a small advantage in time.

Lieutenants Goddard and Hawkins won second place for *El Encanto*. Parkhurst and Lowes, whose sandfly-plagued *City of Peoria* still hadn't left Illinois, were No. 3.

Fourth spot was for Auggy Pedlar and Miss Doran; fifth, Captain Erwin and Eichwaldt in *Dallas Spirit*. Sixth went to Giles, who was still in Detroit with engine trouble, in his *Bluebird*.

Major Irving's *Pabco Flyer* was seventh, the Giffin-Lundgren triplane, *Pride of Los Angeles*, eighth, and Art Goebel's *Woolaroc*, ninth.

No. 10 was assigned to Robert Fowler, of San Francisco, a mail pilot, who still had no airplane. He had had an eye on the Breese monoplane, *Aloha*, but "Last Minute Martin" Jensen beat him to the San Francisco factory with the \$15,000 raised by his wife. Jensen drew No. 11. No. 12 was for Frank Clark's little *Miss Hollydale*. The fingers-crossed No. 13 went to the unnamed ship of Lieutenants Covell and Waggener.

No. 14 was drawn for *Angel of Los Angeles*, a mono-

plane piloted by Captain Arthur V. Rogers, twenty-nine, a Los Angeles commercial aviator, decorated veteran of the Lafayette Escadrille, and father of an infant daughter. His Dole partner was Leland A. Bryant, Los Angeles architect and aircraft builder. They were still in the south, working on their plane.

Last was the trim *Golden Eagle* of Jack Frost and Gordon Scott.

And so they were lined up, and began moving faster toward their destiny.

The first to meet it were Lieutenants Covell and Waggener, for whom Captain Saunders' papier-mâché wastebasket held position No. 13. Two days after the drawing, they died.

They were Pensacola-trained navy men. Covell, twenty-eight, lived with his wife and two children at Coronado. Waggener was a bachelor, and both were stationed at San Diego.

On August 10, with Waggener at the navigation instruments vacated by the ailing Lieutenant Pawlikowski, they took off from San Diego for Oakland, soared into a long gray fog, and slammed into an ocean-shore bluff at Point Loma fifteen minutes later. The plane burst into flames and fell seventy-five feet to the beach. It was a long time before the bodies could be taken from the glowing wreckage.

Two of the twenty-seven were gone. It didn't seem to be so much fun any more at dusty Oakland Airport. There were edgy nerves, and they began to show.

There was trouble with the airplanes, the qualification tests, and even the weather. On August 11, the day before the scheduled start, Dole himself proposed a postponement.

Colonel Clarence Young, director of aeronautics for the Department of Commerce, in charge of qualifying the airplanes, agreed with the Hawaii magnate. "In the interest of aviation and humanity," he said, "this race should not be held tomorrow. It would be suicidal."

Lieutenant Ben Wyatt of the San Diego naval station, supervising the tests for the airmen and their instruments,

felt the same way. Troubled and earnest, he pointed out that too many instruments were too far out of kilter; in fact, he told Auggy Pedlar that the compass of *Miss Doran* was forty-five degrees off.

The slim and intense Auggy, nerved for the flight, stepped up close to Wyatt and snapped: "You can go to hell! I'm flying to Honolulu tomorrow. I'm under contract to get *Miss Doran* there, and I'm going!"

Tempers cooled that evening. The fliers got together, checked the weather and the condition of the planes, and agreed to call everything off until noon the following Tuesday. Pedlar apologized to Wyatt . . .

The next death came the next day.

Captain Rogers, the Lafayette Escadrille veteran, who was to race across the Pacific in *Angel of Los Angeles* with navigator Leland Bryant, took their two-engine monoplane up for a test at Western Air Express Field, Montebello, California. He was alone. He circled a couple of times, seemed to be coming in to land, and went into a nose-dive. *Angel of Los Angeles* plunged 125 feet to the ground, and Rogers was killed. His wife, who was at the field with their infant daughter Millicent in her arms, saw it happen.

Now three of the twenty-seven were gone. A good many of the gay smiles faded entirely, and so did the dashing air of bravado. But there was no stopping the Dole Flight.

The public wouldn't have it, for one thing. By the thousands and thousands, the Dole *aficionados* jammed the roads to the rough dirt airfield, lined the fences in ever-increasing numbers, and ardently desired to see the airplanes go.

The fliers wouldn't have it stopped either. By now, they were winnowed down to the finalists. Robert Fowler was out; he couldn't get an airplane. Frank Clark decided to try for an endurance record in *Miss Hollydale* and withdrew. Giles never did get his *Bluebird* from Detroit to Oakland. *City of Peoria* was disqualified; she couldn't carry enough gas. When they told pilot Parkhurst, he shrugged and lit a cigarette.

That left nine planes, but Captain Giffin and navigator Ted Lundgren weren't in yet from Long Beach in their triplane. They started north early on August 11, landed at Bakersfield for repairs to a leaking gas line, prepared to land at Oakland—and fell into the bay one hundred feet off the airport shore. They crawled out and waited on a wing until firemen came to the rescue. Giffin and Lundgren were all right, but there was no Dole race for the wet and battered *Pride of Los Angeles*.

So there were eight lined up in a semicircle on the clodded Oakland field on the designated Tuesday morning, August 16, 1927: *Golden Eagle*, *Aloha*, *Woolaroc*, *Miss Doran*, *Oklahoma*, *Dallas Spirit*, *El Encanto*, and *Pabco Flyer*. Eight planes of the original fifteen; fifteen men and a girl, of the original twenty-seven who wanted to go.

From all over the West, the onlookers trooped to the airport, 75,000 to 100,000 of them, to watch the great adventure begin. It was foggy, and the dust stirred up by the autos swirled over the field. Art Goebel was a little grumpy; Auggy Pedlar was tense but smiling; his navigator, Lieutenant Knope, seemed grim.

Mildred Doran had raspberries, toast, and coffee for breakfast, and posted a letter to a friend in Flint, Michigan. "Our plane is the favored one," it read. "We are sure going to be the first there."

Mildred wore her flying suit and her fraternity pins. When someone asked her if she had any "last words," she didn't resent it. "Last words? I haven't any but 'goodbye' and 'I love you,'" she said. "Afraid? Of course not. I'm happy and ready to go."

Martin Jensen, chipper and bright, found that someone had ripped a seat cushion in *Aloha's* cockpit. He got a thread and needle, and mended it sitting crosslegged on the fuselage.

Jack Frost's pretty red-haired sister, Shirila, stood with him beside the sleek *Golden Eagle* and said goodbye.

Freddy Reposa, a small barefooted boy from nearby

San Leandro, arrived on a plow horse. A policeman showed him where to tether it.

Captain "Lone Star Bill" Erwin rested one hand on *Dallas Spirit's* fuselage and said, "If we get off the ground, we'll be long gone."

At 10:40 A.M., the sun burned through the fog. Just before noon the starter picked up his black-and-white checkerboard flag. At half a minute past twelve, *Oklahoma* bumped down the runway, gained the air in a lumbering rush, and went out toward the Golden Gate.

There was a great cheer, and the Dole race was on.

In just a moment, the cheer became a shriek. Lieutenants Goddard and Hawkins rocked down the runway in *El Encanto*, and suddenly shot off to the right, forty-eight hundred feet from the starting line. *El Encanto* stumbled, fell over, and smashed her left wing. The horrified crowd surged against the fences, policemen shoved them back, and Goddard and Hawkins crawled out, unhurt but out of the Dole Flight.

Then *Pabco Flyer* tried. Major Irving managed to get her into the air, but only briefly. She rose and dropped, lifted again, was dragged back by her heavy load of gas, and ran off the runway. Seven thousand feet from the starting line, she bogged down in marshland, undamaged. She just couldn't get off the ground.

Golden Eagle was given the next starting signal. The shaky spectators breathed more smoothly—here was the strong, streamlined, able ship that was probably going to win the race. And *Golden Eagle* was handsomely in character. She ran lightly along the runway, was easily airborne, and soared off to the west.

Then everyone looked at *Miss Doran*. The little plane was battered by pre-race accidents and loaded with more gas than she could handily carry, but she got away. Temporarily, that is. Ten minutes later she was back with a sputtering motor that Auggy Pedlar didn't trust for a twenty-four hundred mile flight.

By this time *Oklahoma* was back too. She got as far as

the Pacific shore, but something ripped her fuselage, and Griffin and Henley knew that to proceed would be suicide. They stood together by their plane, unsociable and uncommunicative, conferring on what to do.

Dallas Spirit did the same. She made it off the ground, but something didn't work right in the tail assembly, so Captain Erwin and Eichwaldt returned.

Aloha, with Jensen and Captain Schluter, lurched down the rough runway with mechanics holding onto her struts, lifted slowly, and went on out. Goebel's *Woolaroc* flew low, barely clearing the nearby trees, and kept going west.

Of the false starters, *Miss Doran* and *Pabco Flyer* decided on a second try. Major Irving's plane promptly crashed, from an altitude of seventy feet, and the capricious Fate that watched over the Dole Flight spared him. He was unhurt, but his airplane was all through.

Miss Doran made it on the second attempt. Pedlar wanted Mildred to stay behind, but she wouldn't. Her face was white, and she wasn't smiling, but she went along with Auggy and Lieutenant Knope.

So on the afternoon of August 16, 1927, four little airplanes were bound west from California to Hawaii: *Golden Eagle*, *Aloha*, *Woolaroc*, and *Miss Doran*. A good many prayers were said for them by those who watched them go.

The next day, it was like this:

Art Goebel, of Hollywood's "Thirteen Black Cats," was there first in *Woolaroc* with Lieutenant Davis—twenty-six hours, seventeen minutes, and \$25,000.

Martin Jensen, who cockily said he had to do it because his wife would smack him with an oar if he didn't, was second in *Aloha* with Captain Schluter. It took them twenty-eight hours, sixteen minutes, and won them \$10,000. Jensen's wife, waiting at the airport, fainted when she saw him come in.

Golden Eagle and *Miss Doran* were never heard from again.

All that next long day, the hopes stayed alive. They were down, floating on the ocean. They had overshot the

mark and were somewhere west of Wheeler Field. They had crash-landed on a mountain in eastern Hawaii. They were safe, somewhere. They had to be. Mildred Doran's brother William, in Detroit, said, "Mildred will come through. She's too good to go that way." In Santa Monica, Kathleen Scott, nineteen, sister of Frost's navigator Gordon Scott, in *Golden Eagle*, said through tears: "I just know he will be all right."

But they were gone. Gradually, reluctantly, it was accepted: the pretty Mildred, who had had no last words but "goodbye" and "I love you," was dead in the sea. So was straw-hatted Auggy Pedlar, and so was Lieutenant Knope. Gordon Scott was gone, and Jack Frost, who had scoffed at "one more thirteen in my life." Most observers figured *Miss Doran* probably went down close to the California shore; no one could even guess what happened to the sturdy *Golden Eagle*.

There was a tremendous search, both from the North American continent and from Hawaii. A fleet of navy vessels combed the ocean; merchant ships were on the lookout; and nobody found anything. Most of the public grief was over Mildred Doran. She was so young and so pretty, and she had her five fraternity pins on her flying suit when she died.

There was another chapter still to be written. Three days later, Captain Erwin and Alvin Eichwaldt decided they would go after all. They said they would take *Dallas Spirit* out and look for the lost planes on their way to Hawaii. They fixed up the tail assembly and took off from Oakland on August 19, and even in the sad circumstances they were gay. They radioed jesting messages: at 2:17 P.M., "Just passed the coast, love to Ma." At 5:11: "Just passed the S. S. *Moana* and dipped in salute. They answered on the whistle." At 5:45: "Just saw a rum-runner on the left and had a hell of a time keeping Ike in—Bill." At 6:05: "Please tell the gentleman who furnished our lunch that it is fine, but we can't find the toothpicks."

The last message from *Dallas Spirit* came at 9:00 P.M., from six hundred miles at sea.

It was excited, but not panicky: "SOS, SOS. We are in a tailspin."

There was a break; then: "Came out of it OK, but we were scared. It was sure a close-call. We thought it was all off, but we came out of it. The lights on the instrument board went out, and it was so dark Bill couldn't see the. . . ."

A second later:

"We are in a tailspin. SOS, SOS. . . ."

No one ever heard anything more from *Dallas Spirit*.

Connie, the young wife of Captain Erwin, cried out when they told her: "Why couldn't I have been with Bill when he fell?" Not yet twenty-one, she was a widow.

That made it ten lives lost: Covell, Waggener, and Rogers, before the race; Mildred Doran, Pedlar, Lieutenant Knope, Jack Frost, and Gordon Scott during it; Erwin and Eichwaldt, afterward. In Honolulu, they called off the big celebration for the winning crews of *Woolaroc* and *Aloha*. Dole, heartbroken, handed them their checks, and they accepted without smiles.

For a long time afterward, there were reports of the fliers—mysterious flares on an island, a metal tank seen floating in the ocean, a bit of unidentified wreckage. But no one ever knew just what happened to them.

Each week, a number of big planes leave San Francisco International Airport for the transpacific run, and the same amount make the trip the other way. Somewhere out over the shining gray sea they pass the unknown places where the tiny ships went down years ago. Perhaps in the heavy hum of their multiple power plants, and the strong thrust of their wings against the high-altitude winds, there is a memorial of sorts for the Dolebirds.

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